

ACME

SUMMER NO. 16

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MAGAZINE OF HORROR

BIZARRE



FRIGHTENING



GRUESOME



THE MONSTER OF THE PROPHECY

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THE DOG THAT LAUGHED

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NIGHT AND SILENCE

by MAURICE
LEVEL



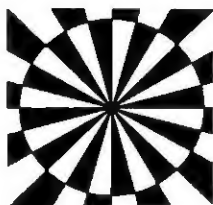
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m a g a z i n e o f HORROR

The Bizarre and The Unusual

Volume 3	CONTENTS FOR SUMMER	Number 4
THE EDITOR'S PAGE		4
NIGHT AND SILENCE	Maurice Level	5
LAZARUS	Leonid Andreyeff	9
MR. OCTBUR	Joseph Payne Brennan	27
THE DOG THAT LAUGHED	Charles Willard Diffin	30
AH, SWEET YOUTH	Pauline Kappel Prilucik	49
THE MAN WHO NEVER WAS	R. A. Lafferty	59
THE LEADEN RING	S. Baring-Gould	68
THE RECKONING		81
THE MONSTER OF THE PROPHECY (novelet)	Clark Ashton Smith	82
A SONG FOR MEN THAT LAUGH (verse)	Robert E. Howard	118
IT IS WRITTEN (Your Comments and Ours)		119
COMING NEXT ISSUE		121
READER'S PREFERENCE COUPON (double-barrelled)		129/130

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, *Editor*

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The Editor's Page

THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT of a story which fits into the range of the bizarre, gruesome, frightening, weird, etc., is that it be convincing on its own terms; that the author succeed in persuading the reader to suspend disbelief in the unusual situation and events long enough to keep him reading the story from beginning to end. The quality of writing cannot be too good — there is no ceiling — but, oddly enough, the very highest is not always necessary in order to attain this essential. A spell can be woven without perfect diction, without perfect ordering on the part of the word-magician. This does not constitute a license for carelessness or slovenliness to anyone. The fact that Robert E. Howard and Edgar Rice Burroughs, to name just two examples, often triumph over the most ridiculous sloppiness and nonsense in their stories does not mean that *you* can, if you want to write imaginative fiction.

I mention this because in reading some of the manuscripts that come in, it is clear to me that the author has (consciously or unconsciously, I can't be sure which) said to himself, "Well, Howard or Burroughs or who ever did it, so there's no reason why I shouldn't!" No, no, no, no, no! There's every reason that you shouldn't—and the first is that you are *aware* of their shortcomings; they were not.

One of the worst fallacies that the beginning writer can fall into is the old "inspiration" fallacy — the notion that one can just let a story flow from the subconscious, or the top of the head and that's it.

By all means, let inspiration be a *starting point*, when it comes. But then you must shape and direct it: it is up to *you* to work out thoroughly the material that has been "given" to you from inspiration. The *general outline* of the story should be before you before you start to write.

Does that mean that the door to further inspiration should be firmly closed at that point? By no means. Let it carry you beyond the bare essentials of the outline; let it revise and expand the outline when it will — but *watch what is going on*. Look to see what the changes you have made all unplannedly mean, and what further changes will be necessary in order to maintain a thorough working-out of the story. RAWL.

Night And Silence

by Maurice Level

MAURICE LEVEL's three stories in *WEIRD TALES* were all of the *contes cruels* sort, and all were brief, but decidedly to the point. This one, however, is the one that strikes me as being the most nearly weird.

THEY WERE old, crippled, horrible. The woman hobbled about on two crutches; one of the men, blind, walked with his eyes shut, his hands outstretched, his fingers spread open; the other, a deaf-mute, followed with his head lowered, rarely raising the sad, restless eyes that were the only sign of life in his impassive face.

It was said that they were two brothers and a sister, and that they were united by a savage affection. One was never

seen without the other; at the church doors they shrank back into the shadows, keeping away from those professional beggars who stand boldly in the full light so that passers-by may be ashamed to ignore their importunancy. They did not ask for anything. Their appearance alone was a prayer for help. As they moved silently through the narrow, gloomy streets, a mysterious trio, they seemed to personify Age, Night, and Silence.

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WEIRD TALES, February, no record of separate renewal.

One evening, in their hovel near the gates of the city, the woman died peacefully in their arms, without a cry, with just one long look of distress which the deaf-mute saw, and one violent shudder which the blind man felt because her hand clasped his wrist. Without a sound she passed into eternal silence.

Next day, for the first time, the two men were seen without her. They dragged about all day without even stopping at the baker's shop where they usually received doles of bread. Toward dusk, when lights began to twinkle at the dark crossroads, when the reflection of lamps gave the houses the appearance of a smile, they bought with the few half-pence they had received two poor little candles, and they returned to the desolate hovel where the old sister lay on her pallet with no one to watch or pray for her.

They kissed the dead woman. The man came to put her in her coffin. The deal boards were fastened down and the coffin was placed on two wooden trestles; then, once more alone, the two brothers laid a sprig of boxwood on a plate, lighted their candles, and sat down for the last all-too-short vigil.

Outside, the cold wind played round the joints of the ill-fitting door. Inside, the small trembling flames barely broke

the darkness with their yellow light. . . . Not a sound . . .

For a long time they remained like this, praying, remembering, meditating. . . .

Tired out with weeping, at last they fell asleep.

When they woke it was still night. The lights of the candles still glimmered, but they were lower. The cold that is the precursor of dawn made them shiver. But there was something else — what was it? They leaned forward, the one trying to see, the other to hear. For some time they remained motionless; then, there being no repetition of what had roused them, they lay down again and began to pray.

Suddenly, for the second time, they sat up. Had either of them been alone, he would have thought himself the plaything of some fugitive hallucination. When one sees without hearing, or hears without seeing, illusion is easily created. But something abnormal was taking place; there could be no doubt about it since both were affected, since it appealed both to eyes and ears at the same time; they were fully conscious of this, but were unable to understand.

Between them they had the power of complete comprehension. Singly, each had but a partial, agonizing conception.

The deaf-mute got up and walked about. Forgetting his

brother's infirmity, the blind man asked in a voice choked with fear, "What is it? What's the matter? Why have you got up?"

He heard him moving, coming and going, stopping, starting off again, and again stopping; and having nothing but these sounds to guide his reason, his terror increased till his teeth began to chatter. He was on the point of speaking again, but remembered, and relapsed into a muttering, "What can he see? What is it?"

The deaf-mute took a few more steps, rubbed his eyes, and presumably reassured, went back to his mattress and fell asleep.

The blind man heaved a sigh of relief, and silence fell once more, broken only by the prayers he mumbled in a monotonous undertone, his soul benumbed by grief as he waited till sleep should come and pour light into his darkness.

HE WAS almost sleeping when the murmurs which had before made him tremble, wrenched him from an uneasy doze.

It sounded like a soft scratching mingled with light blows on a plank, curious rubbings, and stifled moans.

He leaped up. The deaf-mute had not moved. Feeling that the fear that culminates in panic

was threatening him, he strove to reason with himself.

"Why should this noise terrify me? . . . The night is always full of sounds. . . . My brother is moving uneasily in his sleep . . . yes, that's it. . . . Just now I heard him walking up and down, and there was the same noise. . . . It must have been the wind. . . . But I know the sound of the wind, and it has never been like that . . . it was a noise I had never heard. . . . What could it have been? No . . . it could not be. . . ."

He bit his fists. An awful suspicion had come to him.

"Suppose . . . no, it's not possible. . . . Suppose it was . . . there it is again! . . . Again . . . louder and louder . . . some one is scratching, scratching, knocking. . . . My God! A voice . . . her voice! She is calling! She is crying! Help, help!"

He threw himself out of bed and roared, "Francois! . . . quick! . . . Help! . . . Look! . . ."

He was half mad with fear. He tore wildly at his hair, shouting "Look! . . . You've got eyes, you, you can see! . . ."

The moans became louder, the raps firmer. Feeling his way, stumbling against the walls, knocking against the packing-cases which served as furniture, tripping in the hole in the floor, he staggered about trying to find his sleeping brother.

He fell and got up again, bruised, covered with blood,

sobbing, "I have no eyes! I have no eyes!"

He had upset the plate on which lay the sprig of box, and the sound of the earthenware breaking on the floor gave the finishing touch to his panic.

"Help! What have I done? Help!"

The noises grew louder and more terrifying, and as an agonized cry sounded, his last doubts left him. Behind his empty eyes, he imagined he saw the horrible thing. . . .

He saw the old sister beating against the tightly-closed lid of her coffin. He saw her superhuman terror, her agony, a thousand times worse than that of any other death. . . . She was there, alive, yes alive, a few steps away from him . . . but where? She heard his steps, his voice, and he, blind, could do nothing to help her.

Where was his brother? Flinging his arms from right to left, he knocked over the candles: the wax flowed over his fingers, hot, like blood. The noise grew louder, more despairing; the voice was speaking, saying words that died away in smothered groans. . . .

"Courage!" he shrieked. "I'm here! I'm coming!"

He was now crawling along on his knees, and a sudden turn flung him against a bed; he

thrust out his arms, felt a body, seized it by the shoulders and shook it with all the strength that remained in him.

Violently awakened, the deaf-mute sprang up uttering horrible cries and trying to see, but now that the candles were out, he, too, was plunged into night, the impenetrable darkness that held more terror for him than for the blind man. Stupefied with sleep, he groped about wildly with his hands, which closed in a vise-like grip on his brother's throat, stifling cries of, "Look! Look!"

They rolled together on the floor, upsetting all that came in their way, knotted together, ferociously tearing each other with tooth and nail. In a very short time their hoarse breathing had died away. The voice, so distant and yet so near, was cut short by a spasm . . . there was a cracking noise . . . the imprisoned body was raising itself in one last supreme effort for freedom . . . a grinding noise . . . sobs . . . again the grinding noise . . . silence. . . .

Outside, the trees shuddered as they bowed in the gale; the rain beat against the walls. The late winter's dawn was still crouching on the edge of the horizon. Inside the walls of the hovel, not a sound, not a breath.

Night and Silence.

Lazarus

by Leonid Andreyeff

You may question the theology of this powerful story by a noted Russian author, if you're disposed to theological disputation, but we don't think you'll question its impact.

WHEN LAZARUS left the grave, where for three days and three nights he had been under the enigmatical sway of death, and returned alive to his dwelling, for a long time no one noticed in him those sinister things which made his name a terror as time went on. Gladdened by the sight of him who had been returned to life, those near to him made much of him, and satisfied their burning desire to serve him, in solicitude for his food and drink and garments. They dressed him gorgeously, and when, like

a bridegroom in his bridal clothes, he sat again among them at the table and ate and drank, they wept with tenderness. And they summoned the neighbors to look at him who had risen miraculously from the dead. These came and shared the joy of the hosts. Strangers from far-off towns and hamlets came and adored the miracle in tempestuous words. The house of Mary and Martha was like a beehive.

Whatever was found new in Lazarus' face and gestures was thought to be some trace of

a grave illness and of the shocks recently experienced. Evidently the destruction wrought by death on the corpse was only arrested by the miraculous power, but its effects were still apparent; and what death had succeeded in doing with Lazarus' face and body was like an artist's unfinished sketch seen under thin glass. On Lazarus' temples, under his eyes, and in the hollows of his cheeks, lay a deep and cadaverous blueness; cadaverously blue also were his long fingers, and around his finger-nails, grown long in the grave, the blue had become purple and dark. On his lips, swollen in the grave the skin had burst in places, and thin reddish cracks were formed, shining as though covered with transparent mica. And he had grown stout. His body, puffed up in the grave, retained its monstrous size and showed those frightful swellings in which one sensed the presence of the rank liquid of decomposition. But the heavy corpselike odor which penetrated Lazarus' grave-clothes and, it seemed, his very body, soon entirely disappeared, the blue spots on his face and hands grew paler, and the reddish cracks closed up, although they never disappeared altogether. That is how Lazarus looked when he appeared before people, in his second life, but his face looked

natural to those who had seen him in the coffin.

In addition to the changes in his appearance, Lazarus' temper seemed to have undergone a transformation, but this had attracted no attention. Before his death Lazarus had always been cheerful and care-free, fond of laughter and a merry joke. It was because of this brightness and cheerfulness, with not a touch of malice and darkness that the Master had grown so fond of him. But now Lazarus had grown grave and taciturn, he never jested, nor responded with laughter to other people's jokes; and the words which he very infrequently uttered were the plainest, most ordinary and necessary words, as deprived of depth and significance as those sounds with which animals express pain and pleasure, thirst and hunger. They were the words that one can say all one's life, and yet they give no indication of what pains and gladdens the depths of the soul.

Thus, with the face of a corpse which for three days had been under the heavy sway of death, dark and taciturn, already appallingly transformed, but still unrecognized by anyone in his new self, he was sitting at the feast-table among friends and relatives, and his gorgeous nuptial garments glittered with yellow

gold and bloody scarlet. Broad waves of jubilation, now soft; now tempestuously sonorous surged around him; warm glances of love were reaching out for his face, still cold with the coldness of the grave; and a friend's warm palm caressed his blue, heavy hand. Music played — the tympanum and the pipe, the cithara and the harp. It was as though bees hummed, grasshoppers chirped and birds warbled over the happy house of Mary and Martha.

2

ONE OF THE guests incautiously lifted the veil. By a thoughtless word he broke the serene charm and uncovered the truth in all its naked ugliness. Ere the thought formed itself in his mind, his lips uttered with a smile: "Why do you not tell us what happened yonder?"

All grew silent, startled by the question. It was as if it occurred to them only now that for three days Lazarus had been dead, and they looked at him, anxiously awaiting his answer. But Lazarus kept silence.

"You do not wish to tell us," wondered the man; "is it so terrible yonder?"

And again his thought came after his words. Had it been otherwise, he would not have

asked this question, which at that very moment oppressed his heart with its insufferable horror. Uneasiness seized all present, and with a feeling of heavy weariness they awaited Lazarus' words, but he was sternly and coldly silent, and his eyes were lowered. As if for the first time, they noticed the frightful blueness of his face and his repulsive obesity. On the table, as if forgotten by Lazarus, rested his bluish-purple wrist, and to this all eyes turned, as if it were from it that the awaited answer was to come. The musicians were still playing, but now the silence reached them too, and even as water extinguishes scattered embers, so were their merry tunes extinguished in the silence. The pipe grew silent; the voices of the sonorous tympanum and the murmuring harp died away; and as if the strings had burst, the cithara answered with a tremulous, broke note. Silence.

"You do not wish to say?" repeated the guest, unable to check his chattering tongue. But the stillness remained unbroken, and the bluish-purple hand rested motionless. And then he stirred slightly and everyone felt relieved. He lifted up his eyes, and lo! straightway embracing everything in one heavy glance, fraught with weariness and horror, he looked

at them — Lazarus who had arisen from the dead.

IT WAS THE third day since Lazarus had left the grave. Ever since then many had experienced the pernicious power of his eye, but neither those who were crushed by it forever, nor those who found the strength to resist in it the primordial sources of life, which is as mysterious as death, never could they explain the horror which lay motionless in the depth of his black pupils. Lazarus looked calmly and simply with no desire to conceal anything, but also with no intention to say anything; he looked coldly, as one who is infinitely indifferent to those alive. Many carefree people came close to him without noticing him, and only later did they learn with astonishment and fear who that calm stout man was that walked slowly by, almost touching them with his gorgeous and dazzling garments. The sun did not cease shining, when he was looking nor did the fountain hush its murmur, and the sky overhead remained cloudless and blue. But the man under the spell of his enigmatical look heard no more the fountain and saw not the sky overhead. Sometimes he wept bitterly, sometimes he tore his hair and in a frenzy called for help; but more often it came to pass

that apathetically and quietly he began to die, and so he languished many years, before everybody's eyes wasted away, colorless, flabby, dull, like a tree silently drying up in a stony soil. And of those who gazed at him, the one who wept madly sometimes felt again the stir of life; the others never.

"So you do not wish to tell us what you have seen yonder?" repeated the man. But now his voice was impassive and dull, and deadly gray weariness showed in Lazarus' eyes. And deadly gray weariness covered like dust all the faces, and with dull amazement the guests stared at each other and did not understand wherefore they had gathered here and sat at the rich table. The talk ceased. They thought it was time to go home, but could not overcome the weariness which glued their muscles, and they kept on sitting there, yet apart and torn away from each other, like pale fires scattered over a dark field.

But the musicians were paid to play, and again they took their instruments, and again tunes full of studied mirth and studied sorrow began to flow and to rise. They unfolded the customary melody, but the guests harkened in dull amazement. Already they knew not why it is necessary, and why it

is well, that people should pluck strings, inflate their cheeks, blow in thin pipes, and produce a bizarre, many-voiced noise.

"What bad music!" said someone.

The musicians took offense and left. Following them, the guests left one after another, for night was already come. And when placid darkness encircled them and they began to breathe with more ease, suddenly Lazarus' image loomed up before each one in formidable radiance: the blue face of a corpse, grave clothes gorgeous and resplendent, a cold look in the depths of which lay motionless an unknown horror. As though petrified, they were standing far apart, and darkness enveloped them, but in the darkness blazed brighter and brighter the supernatural vision of him who for three days had been under the enigmatica sway of death. For three days had he been dead: thrice had the sun risen and set, but he had been dead. And now he is again among them, touches them, looks at them, and through the black disks of his pupils, as through darkened glass, stares the unknowable Yonder.

3

NO ONE was taking care of Lazarus, for no friends, no rel-

atives were left to him, and the great desert, which encircled the holy city, came near the very threshold of his dwelling. And the desert entered his house, and stretched on his couch, like a wife, and extinguished the fires. No one was taking care of Lazarus. One after the other, his sisters — Mary and Martha—forsook him. For a long while Martha was loath to abandon him, for she knew not who would feed him and pity him. She wept and prayed. But one night, when the wind was roaming in the desert and with a hissing sound the cypresses were bending over the roof, she dressed noiselessly, and secretly left the house. Lazarus probably heard the door slam; it banged against the sidepost under the gusts of the desert wind, but he did not rise to go out and look at her that was abandoning him. All the night long the cypresses hissed over his head and plaintively thumped the door, letting in the cold, greedy desert.

Like a leper he was shunned by everyone, and it was proposed to tie a bell to his neck, as is done with lepers, to warn people against sudden meetings. But someone remarked, growing frightfully pale, that it would be too horrible if by night the moaning of Lazarus' bell were suddenly heard under the pillows, and so the project was abandoned.

And since he did not take care of himself, he would probably have starved to death, had not the neighbors brought him food in fear of something that they sensed but vaguely. The food was brought to him by children; they were not afraid of Lazarus, nor did they mock him with naive cruelty, as children are wont to do with the wretched and miserable. They were indifferent to him, and Lazarus answered them with the same coldness; he had no desire to caress the black little curls, and to look into their innocent shining eyes. Given to Time and to the desert, his house was crumbling down, and long since had his famishing goats wandered away to the neighboring pastures. His bridal garments became threadbare. Ever since that happy day when the musicians played, he had worn them unaware of the difference of the new and the worn. The bright colors grew dull and faded; vicious dogs and the sharp thorns of the desert turned the tender fabric into rags.

By day, when the merciless sun slew all things alive, and even scorpions sought shelter under stones and writhed there in a mad desire to sting, he sat motionless under the sun's rays, his blue face and the uncouth, bushy beard lifted up, bathing in the fiery flood.

When people still talked to

him, he was once asked: "Poor Lazarus, does it please you to sit thus and to stare at the sun?"

And he had answered: "Yes, it does."

So strong, it seemed, was the cold of his three days' grave, so deep the darkness, that there was no heat on earth to warm Lazarus, nor a splendor that could brighten the darkness of his eyes. That is what came to the mind of those who spoke to Lazarus, and with a sigh they left him.

And when the scarlet, flattened globe would lower, Lazarus would set out for the desert and walk straight toward the sun, as if striving to reach it. He always walked straight toward the sun, and those who tried to follow him and to spy upon what he was doing at night in the desert, retained in their memory the black silhouette of a tall stout man against the red background of an enormous flattened disk. Night pursued them with her horrors, and so they did not learn of Lazarus' doings in the desert, but the vision of the black on red was forever branded on their brains. Just as a beast with a splinter in its eye furiously rubs its muzzle with its paws, so they too foolishly rubbed their eyes, but what Lazarus had given was indelible, and Death alone could efface it.

But there were people who

lived far away, who never saw Lazarus and knew of him only by report. With daring curiosity, which is stronger than fear and feeds upon it, with hidden mockery, they would come to Lazarus who was sitting in the sun and enter into conversation with him. By this time Lazarus' appearance had changed for the better and was not so terrible. The first minute they snapped their fingers and thought of how stupid the inhabitants of the holy city were; but when the short talk was over and they started homeward, their looks were such that the inhabitants of the holy city recognized them at once and said: "Look, there is one more fool on whom Lazarus has set his eye;" and they shook their heads regretfully, and lifted up their arms.

THERE CAME brave, intrepid warriors, with tinkling weapons; happy youths came with laughter and song; busy tradesmen, jingling their money, ran in for a moment, and haughty priests leaned their crosiers against Lazarus' door, and they were all strangely changed, as they came back. The same terrible shadow swooped down upon their souls and gave a new appearance to the old familiar world.

Those who still had the desire to speak, expressed their feelings thus:

"All things tangible and vis-

ible grew hollow, light and transparent, similar to lightsome shadows in the darkness of night;

"For that great darkness, which holds the whole cosmos, was dispersed neither by the sun nor by the moon and the stars, but like an immense black shroud enveloped the earth and like a mother embraced it;

"It penetrated all the bodies, iron and stone, and the particles of the bodies, having lost their ties, grew lonely; and it penetrated into the depth of the particles, and the particles of particles became lonely;

"For that great void, which encircles the cosmos, was not filled by things visible, neither by the sun, nor by the moon and the stars, but reigned unrestrained, penetrating everywhere, severing body from body, particle from particle;

"In the void, hollow trees spread hollow roots threatening a fantastic fall; temples, palaces, and houses loomed up and they were hollow; and in the void men moved about restlessly, but they were light and hollow like shadows;

"For time was no more, and the beginning of all things came near their end: the building was still being built, and builders were still hammering away, and its ruins were already seen and the void in its place; the man was still being born, but already funeral candles were burning at

his head, and now they were extinguished, and there was the void in place of the man and of the funeral candles;

"And wrapped by void and darkness the man in despair trembled in the face of the horror of the infinite."

Thus spake the men who had still a desire to speak. But, surely, much more could those have told who wished not to speak, and died in silence.

4

AT THAT TIME there lived in Rome a renowned sculptor. In clay, marble and bronze he wrought bodies of gods and men, and such was their beauty that people called them immortal. But he himself was discontented and asserted that there was something even more beautiful, that he could not embody either in marble or in bronze. "I have not yet gathered the glimmers of the moon, nor have I my fill of sunshine," he was wont to say, "and there is no soul in my marble, no life in my beautiful bronze." And when on moonlight nights he slowly walked along the road, crossing the black shadows of cypresses, his white tunic glittering in the moonshine, those who met him would laugh in a friendly way and say:

"Are you going to gather moonshine, Aurelius? Why then did you not fetch baskets?"

And he would answer, laughing and pointing to his eyes:

"Here are the baskets wherein I gather the sheen of the moon and the glimmer of the sun."

And so it was: the moon glimmered in his eyes and the sun sparkled therein. But he could not translate them into marble, and therein lay the serene tragedy of his life.

He was descended from ancient patrician race, had a good wife and children, and suffered from no want.

When the obscure rumor about Lazarus reached him, he consulted his wife and friends and undertook the far journey to Judea to see him who had miraculously risen from the dead. He was somewhat weary in those days and he hoped that the road would sharpen his blunted senses. What was said of Lazarus did not frighten him: he had pondered much over Death, did not like it, but he disliked also those who confused it with life. "In this life are life and beauty," thought he; "beyond is Death, and enigmatical; and there is no better thing for a man to do than to delight in life and in the beauty of all things living." He had even a vainglorious desire to convince Lazarus of the truth of his own view and restore his soul to life, as his body had been restored. This seemed so much easier because the rumors, shy

and strange, did not render the whole truth about Lazarus and but vaguely warned against something frightful.

Lazarus had just risen from the stone in order to follow the sun which was setting in the desert, when a rich Roman, attended by an armed slave, approached him and addressed him in a sonorous voice: "Lazarus!"

And Lazarus beheld a superb face, lit with glory, and arrayed in fine clothes, and precious stones sparkling in the sun. The red light lent to the Roman's face and head the appearance of gleaming bronze: that also Lazarus noticed. He resumed obediently his place and lowered his weary eyes.

"Yes, you are ugly, my poor Lazarus," quietly said the Roman, playing with his golden chain; "you are even horrible, my poor friend; and Death was not lazy that day when you fell so heedlessly into his hands. But you are stout, and, as the great Caesar used to say, fat people are not ill-tempered: to tell the truth, I don't understand why men fear you. Permit me to spend the night in your house; the hour is late, and I have no shelter."

Never had anyone asked Lazarus' hospitality.

"I have no bed," said he.

"I am somewhat of a soldier and I can sleep sitting," the Ro-

man answered. "We shall build a fire."

"I have no fire."

"Then we shall have our talk in the darkness, like two friends. I think you will find a bottle of wine."

"I have no wine."

The Roman laughed.

"Now I see why you are so somber and dislike your second life. No wine! Why, then we shall do without it: there are words that make the head go round better than the Falernian."

By a sign he dismissed the slave, and they remained alone. And again the sculptor started speaking, but it was as if, together with the setting sun, life had left his words; and they grew pale and hollow, as if they staggered on unsteady feet, as if they slipped and fell down, drunk with the heavy lees of weariness and despair. And black chasms grew up between the worlds, like far-off hints of the great void and the great darkness.

"Now I am your guest, and you will not be unkind to me, Lazarus!" said he. "Hospitality is the duty even of those who for three days were dead. Three days, I was told, you rested in the grave. There it must be cold . . . and thence comes your ill habit of going without fire and wine. As to me, I like fire; it grows dark here so rapidly. . . . The lines of your eyebrows and

forehead are quite, quite interesting: they are like ruins of strange palaces, buried in ashes after an earthquake. But why do you wear such ugly and queer garments? I have seen bridegrooms in your country, and they wear such clothes — are they not funny? — and terrible? . . . But are you a bridegroom?"

THE SUN HAD already disappeared, a monstrous black shadow came running from the east, it was as if gigantic bare feet began rumbling on the sand, and the wind sent a cold wave along the backbone.

"In the darkness you seem still larger, Lazarus, as if you have grown stouter in these moments. Do you feed on darkness, Lazarus? I would fain have a little fire — at least a little fire, a little fire. I feel somewhat chilly, your nights are so barbarously cold. Were it not so dark, I should say that you were looking at me, Lazarus. Yes, it seems to me you are looking. . . . Why, you are looking at me, I feel it — but there you are smiling."

Night came, and filled the air with heavy blackness.

"How well it will be, when the sun will rise tomorrow, anew. . . . I am a great sculptor, you know; that is how my friends call me. I create. Yes, that is the word . . . but I need daylight. I give life to the cold marble, I melt sonorous bronze

in fire, in bright hot fire. . . . Why did you touch me with your hand?"

"Come," said Lazarus. "You are my guest."

They went to the house. And a long night enveloped the earth.

The slave, seeing that his master did not come, went to seek him, when the sun was already high in the sky. And he beheld his master side by side with Lazarus: in profound silence they were sitting right under the dazzling and scorching rays of the sun and looking upward. The slave began to weep and cried out: "My master, what has befallen you, master?"

The very same day the sculptor left for Rome. On the way Aurelius was pensive and taciturn, staring attentively at everything — the men, the ship, the sea, as if trying to retain something. On the high sea a storm burst upon them, and all through it Aurelius stayed on the deck and eagerly scanned the seas looming near and sinking with a dull boom.

At home his friends were frightened at the change which had taken place in Aurelius, but he calmed them, saying meaningly: "I have found it."

And without changing the dusty clothes he wore on his journey, he fell to work, and the marble obediently resounded under his sonorous ham-

mer. Long and eagerly he worked, admitting no one, until one morning he announced that the work was ready and ordered his friends to be summoned, severe critics and connoisseurs of art. And to meet them he put on bright and gorgeous garments, that glittered with yellow gold — and scarlet byssus.

"Here is my work," said he thoughtfully.

His friends glanced, and a shadow of profound sorrow covered their faces. It was something monstrous, deprived of all the lines and shapes familiar to the eye, but not without a hint at some new, strange image.

On a thin, crooked twig, or rather on an ugly likeness of a twig, rested askew a blind, ugly shapeless, outspread mass of something utterly and inconceivably distorted, a mad heap of wild and bizarre fragments, all feebly and vainly striving to part from one another. And, as if by chance, beneath one of the wildly-rent salients a butterfly was chiseled with divine skill, all airy loveliness, delicacy, and beauty with transparent wings, which seemed to tremble with an impotent desire to take flight.

"Wherefore this wonderful butterfly, Aurelius?" said somebody falteringly.

But it was necessary to tell the truth, and one of his friends

who loved him best said firmly: "This is ugly, my poor friend. It must be destroyed. Give me the hammer."

And with two strokes he broke the monstrous man into pieces, leaving only the infinitely delicate butterfly untouched.

From that time on Aurelius created nothing. With profound indifference he looked at marble and bronze, and on his former divine works, where everlasting beauty rested. With the purpose of arousing his former fervent passion for work and awakening his deadened soul, his friends took him to see other artists' beautiful works, but he remained indifferent as before, and the smile did not warm up his tightened lips. And only after listening to lengthy talks about beauty, he would retort wearily and indolently: "But all this is a lie."

By day, when the sun was shining, he went into his magnificent, skilfully built garden, and having found a place without shadow, he exposed his bare head to the glare and heat. Red and white butterflies fluttered around; from the crooked lips of a drunken satyr, water streamed down with a splash into a marble cistern, but he sat motionless and silent, like a pallid reflection of him who, in the far-off distance, at the very gates of the stony desert, sat under the fiery sun.

5

AND NOW IT came to pass that the great, deified Augustus himself summoned Lazarus. The imperial messengers dressed him gorgeously, in solemn nuptial clothes, as if Time had legalized them, and he was to remain until his very death the bridegroom of an unknown bride. It was as if an old, rotting coffin had been gilded and furnished with new, gay tassels. And men, all in trim and bright attire, rode after him, as if in bridal procession indeed, and those foremost trumpeted loudly, bidding people to clear the way for the emperor's messengers. But Lazarus' way was deserted: his native land cursed the hateful name of him who had miraculously risen from the dead, and people scattered at the very news of his appalling approach. The solitary voice of the brass trumpets sounded in the motionless air, and the wilderness alone responded with its languid echo.

Then Lazarus went by sea. And his was the most magnificently arrayed and the most mournful ship that ever mirrored itself in the azure waves of the Mediterranean Sea. Many were the travelers aboard, but like a tomb was the ship, all silence and stillness, and the despairing water sobbed at the steep, proudly curv-

ed prow. All alone sat Lazarus exposing his head to the blaze of the sun, silently listening to the murmur and splash of the wavelets, and afar seamen and messengers were sitting, a vague group of weary shadows. Had the thunder burst and the wind attacked the red sails, the ships would probably have perished, for none of those aboard had either the will or the strength to struggle for life. With a supreme effort some mariners would reach the board and eagerly scan the blue, transparent deep, hoping to see a naiad's pink shoulder flash in the hollow of an azure wave, or a drunken gay centaur dash along and in frenzy splash the wave with his hoof. But the sea was like a wilderness, and the deep was dumb and deserted.

With utter indifference Lazarus set his feet on the street of the eternal city, as if all her wealth, all the magnificence of her palaces built by giants, all the resplendence, beauty, and music of her refined life were but the echo of the wind in the desert quicksand. Chariots were dashing, and along the streets were moving crowds of strong, fair, proud builders of the eternal city and haughty participants in her life; a song sounded; fountains and women laughed a pearly laughter; drunken philosophers harangued, and the sober listened to them with a smile; hoofs struck

the stone pavements. And surrounded by cheerful noise, a stout, heavy man was moving, a cold spot of silence and despair, and on his way he sowed disgust, anger, and vague, gnawing weariness. Who dares to be sad in Rome? the citizens wondered indignantly, and frowned. In two days the entire city had already knew *all* about him who had miraculously risen from the dead, and shunned him shyly.

But some daring people there were, who wanted to test their strength, and Lazarus obeyed their imprudent summons. Kept busy by state affairs, the emperor constantly delayed the reception, and seven days did he who had risen from the dead go about visiting others.

And Lazarus came to a cheerful Epicurean, and the host met him with laughter: "Drink, Lazarus, drink!" he shouted. "Would not Augustus laugh to see you drunk?"

And half-naked drunken women laughed, and rose petals fell on Lazarus' blue hands. But then the Epicurean looked into Lazarus' eyes and his gaiety ended forever. Drunkard remained he for the rest of his life; never did he drink, yet forever was he drunk. But instead of the gay revery which wine brings with it, frightful dreams began to haunt him, the sole food of his stricken spirit. Day and night he lived the

poisonous vapors of his nightmares, and Death itself was not more frightful than its raving, monstrous forerunners.

AND LAZARUS came to a youth and his beloved, who loved each other and were most beautiful in their passions. Proudly and strongly embracing his love, the youth said with serene regret: "Look at us Lazarus, and share our joy. Is there anything stronger than love?"

And Lazarus looked. And for the rest of their life they kept loving each other, but their passion grew gloomy and joyless, like those funeral cypresses whose roots feed on the decay of the graves and whose black summits in a still evening hour seek in vain to reach the sky. Thrown by the unknown forces of life into each other's embraces, they mingled tears with kisses, voluptuous pleasures with pain, and they felt themselves doubly slaves, obedient slaves to life, and patient servants of the silent Nothingness. Ever united, ever severed, they blazed like sparks and like sparks lost themselves in the boundless Dark.

And Lazarus came to a haughty sage, and the sage said to him: "I know all the horrors you can reveal to me. Is that anything you can frighten me with?"

But before long the sage felt

that the knowledge of horror was far from being the horror itself, and that the vision of Death was not Death. And he felt that wisdom and folly are equal before the face of Infinity, for Infinity knows them not. And it vanished, the dividing-line between knowledge and ignorance, truth and falsehood, top and bottom, and the shapeless thought hung suspended in the void. Then the sage clutched his gray head and cried out frantically: "I can not think! I can not think!"

Thus under the indifferent glance for him, who miraculously had risen from the dead, perished everything that asserts life, its significance and joys. And it was suggested that it was dangerous to let him see the emperor, that it was better to kill him, and having buried him secretly, to tell the emperor that he had disappeared no one knew whither. Already swords were being whetted and youths devoted to the public welfare prepared for the murder, when Augustus ordered Lazarus to be brought before him next morning, thus destroying the cruel plans.

If there was no way of getting rid of Lazarus, at least it was possible to soften the terrible impression his face produced. With this in view, skilful painters, barbers, and artists were summoned, and all night long they were busy over La-

zarus' head. They cropped his beard, curled it, and gave it a tidy, agreeable appearance. By means of paints they concealed the corpse-like blueness of his hands and face. Repulsive were the wrinkles of suffering that furrowed his old face, and they were puttied, painted, and smoothed; then, over the smooth background, wrinkles of good-tempered laughter and pleasantly carefree mirth were skilfully painted with fine brushes.

Lazarus submitted indifferently to everything that was done to him. Soon he was turned into a becomingly stout, venerable old man, into a quiet and kind grandfather of numerous offspring. It seemed that the smile, with which only a while ago he was spinning funny yarns, was still lingering on his lips and that in the corner of his eye serene tenderness was hiding, the companion of old age. But people did not dare change his nuptial garments, and they could not change his eyes, two dark and frightful glasses through which the unknowable Yonder looked at men.

6

LAZARUS was not moved by the magnificence of the imperial palace. It was as if he saw no difference between the crumbling house, closely pressed by the desert, and the stone

palace, solid and fair, and indifferently he passed into it. The hard marble of the floors under his feet grew similar to the quicksand of the desert, and the multitude of richly dressed and haughty men became like void air under his glance. No one looked into his face, as Lazarus passed by, fearing to fall under the appalling influence of his eyes; but when the sound of his heavy footsteps had sufficiently died down, the courtiers raised their heads and with fearful curiosity examined the figure of a stout, tall, slightly bent old man, who was slowly penetrating into the very heart of the imperial palace. Were Death itself passing, it would be faced with no greater fear; for until then the dead alone knew Death, and those alive knew Life only — and there was no bridge between them. But this extraordinary man, although alive, knew Death, and enigmatical, appalling, was his cursed knowledge. "Wol!" people thought; "he will take the life of our great, deified Augustus;" and then sent curses after Lazarus, who meanwhile kept on advancing into the interior of the palace.

Already did the emperor know who Lazarus was, and prepared to meet him. But the monarch was a brave man, and felt his own tremendous, unconquerable power, and in his

fatal duel with him who had miraculously risen from the dead he wanted not to invoke human help. And so he met Lazarus face to face.

"Lift not your eyes upon me, Lazarus," he ordered. "I heard your face is like that of Medusa and turns into stone whomsoever you look at. Now, I wish to see you and talk with you, before I turn into stone," he added in a tone of kingly jesting, not devoid of fear.

Coming close to him, he carefully examined Lazarus' face and his strange festal garments. And although he had a keen eye, he was deceived by his appearance.

"So. You do not appear terrible, my venerable old man. But the worse for us, if horror assumes such a respectable and pleasant air. Now let us have a talk."

Augustus sat, and questioning Lazarus with his eye as much as with words, started the conversation: "Why did you not greet me as you entered?"

Lazarus answered indifferently: "I knew not it was necessary."

"Are you a Christian?"

"No."

Augustus approvingly shook his head.

"That is good. I do not like Christians. They shake the tree of life before it is covered with fruit, and disperse its odorous

bloom to the winds. But who are you?"

With a visible effort Lazarus answered: "I was dead."

"I had heard that. But who are you now?"

Lazarus was silent, but at last repeated in a tone of weary apathy: "I was dead."

"Listen to me, stranger," said the emperor, distinctly and severely giving utterance to the thought that had come to him at the beginning, "my realm is the realm of Life, my people are of the living, not of the dead. You are here one too many. I know not who you are and what you saw there; but, if you lie, I hate lies, and if you tell the truth, I hate your truth. In my bosom I feel the throb of life; I feel strength in my arm, and my proud thoughts, like eagles, pierce the space. And yonder in the shelter of my rule, under the protection of laws created by me, people live and toil and rejoice. Do you hear the battle-cry, the challenge men throw into the face of the future?"

Augustus, as if in prayer, stretched forth his arms and exclaimed solemnly: "Be blessed, O great and divine Life!"

LAZARUS WAS silent, and with growing sternness the emperor went on: "You are not wanted here, miserable remnant, snatched from under Death's teeth, you inspire wear-

iness and disgust with life; like a caterpillar in the fields, you gloat on the rich ear of joy and belch out the drivel of despair and sorrow. Your truth is like a rusty sword in the hands of a nightly murderer, and as a murderer you shall be executed. But before that, let me look into your eyes. Perchance only cowards are afraid of them, but in the brave they awake the thirst for strife and victory; then you shall be rewarded, not executed . . . Now, look at me, Lazarus."

At first it appeared to the deified Augustus that a friend was looking at him, so soft, so tenderly fascinating was Lazarus' glance. It promised not horror, but sweet rest, and the Infinite seemed to him a tender mistress, a compassionate sister, a mother. But stronger and stronger grew its embraces, and already the mouth, greedy of hissing kisses, interfered with the monarch's breathing, and already to the surface of the soft tissues of the body came the iron of the bones and tightened its merciless circle, and unknown fangs, blunt and cold, touched his heart and sank into it with slow indolence.

"It pains," said the deified Augustus, growing pale. "But look at me, Lazarus, look."

It was as if some heavy gates, ever closed, were slowly moving apart, and through the growing interstice the appalling

horror of the Infinite poured in slowly and steadily. Like two shadows entered the shoreless void and the unfathomable darkness; they extinguished the sun, ravished the earth from under the feet, and the roof from over the head. No more did the frozen heart ache.

TIME STOOD STILL and the beginning of each thing grew frightfully near to its end. Augustus' throne, just erected, crumbled down, and the void was already in the place of the throne and of Augustus. Noiselessly did Rome crumble down, and a new city stood on its site and it too was swallowed by the void. Like fantastic giants, cities, states and countries fell down and vanished in the void darkness and with uttermost indifference did the insatiable black womb of the Infinite swallow them.

"Halt!" ordered the emperor.

In his voice sounded already a note of indifference, his hands dropped in languor and in the vain struggle with the onrushing darkness his fiery eyes now blazed up, and now went out.

"My life you have taken from me, Lazarus," said he in a spiritless, feeble voice.

And these words of hopelessness saved him. He remembered his people, whose shield he was destined to be, and keen salutary pain pierced his dead-

ened heart. "They are doomed to death," he thought wearily. "Serene shadows in the darkness of the Infinite," thought he, and horror grew upon him. "Trail vessels with living, seething blood, with a heart that knows sorrow and also great joy," said he in his heart, and tenderness pervaded it.

Thus pondering and oscillating between the poles of Life and Death, he slowly came back to life, to find in its suffering and in its joys a shield against the darkness of the void and the horror of the Infinite.

"No, you have not murdered me, Lazarus," said he firmly, "but I will take your life. Begone."

That evening the deified Augustus partook of his meats and drinks with particular joy. Now and then his lifted hand remained and suspended in the air, and a dull glimmer replaced the bright sheen of his fiery eye. It was the cold wave of Horror that surged at his feet. Defeated, but not undone, ever awaiting its hour, that Horror stood at the emperor's bedside, like a black shadow all through his life, it swayed his nights but yielded the days to the sorrows and joys of life.

The following day, the hangman with a hot iron burned out Lazarus' eyes. Then he was sent home. The deified Augustus dared not kill him.

LAZARUS returned to the desert, and the wilderness met him with hissing gusts of wind and the heat of the blazing sun. Again he was sitting on a stone, his rough, bushy beard lifted up; and the two black holes in place of his eyes looked at the sky with an expression of dull terror. Afar off the holy city stirred noisily and restlessly, but around him everything was deserted and dumb. No one approached the place where lived he who had miraculously risen from the dead, and long since his neighbors had forsaken their houses. Driven by the hot iron into the depth of his skull, his cursed knowledge hid there in an ambush. As if leaving out from an ambush it plunged its thousand invisible eyes into the

man, and no one dared look at Lazarus.

And in the evening, when the sun, reddening and growing wider, would come nearer and nearer the western horizon, the blind Lazarus would slowly follow it. He would stumble against stones and fall, stout and weak as he was; would rise heavily to his feet and walk on again; and on the red screen of the sunset his black body and outspread hands would form a monstrous likeness of a cross.

And it came to pass that once he went out and did not come back. Thus seemingly ended the second life of him who for three days had been under the enigmatical sway of death, and rose miraculously from the dead.



Mr. Octbur

by Joseph Payne Brennan

(author of *Black Thing At Midnight*)

JOSEPH PAYNE BRENNAN appeared in WEIRD TALES between 1952 and 1954, and very possibly would have had more than four stories therein had the magazine not died (sob.). He has published collections of his weird verse and short stories, such as *Scream At Midnight*, and a neatly printed amateur magazine entitled MACABRE.

Here he offers a vignette which has an air of strangeness about it.

HE HAD LEFT a long time ago and now, finally, he was returning. The cold winds of autumn were rattling dry leaves along the streets when he entered town. A late afternoon sun slanted its light against the buildings. He looked around in bewilderment.

Much of the old town, as he remembered it, was gone. Half of it? two-thirds of it? Most of

the old brick buildings, blackened with the soot and grime of a century, had been replaced by chromium-fronted horrors, plate-glass, parking-lots. Oh, not all of them; he found a few survivors and inspected them lovingly. But most were gone. Some of the very streets had disappeared.

He wandered disconsolately. The sun slanted lower and the

wind rose, a late autumn wind, a cold and keening wind which seemed to mourn for every vanished thing, a wind blowing out of the all-but-forgotten past, bringing with it the flavor and the memory of other autumns lost in time.

Occasionally, as he chanced across an old house, or an old brick building which had somehow escaped the destroyer's sledge, the memories flooded back — memories from forty, yes, fifty years ago. He would stand, motionless, reminiscing, while the passers-by moved like ghosts, like wraiths out of an alien dimension of time.

Amazingly, as the wind rose and the sun sank, his powers of memory recaptured a clarity which he would have thought impossible of attainment. He found that he could recall entire streets, whole areas, as they had existed a half century before. He had scarcely realized that he possessed such a faculty. What was it they called it? Photographic memory?

He walked about slowly in the dusk, remembering everything. All he needed was a single landmark, even a remembered street-name, and it all came back.

Yes, here was the old ice-house, and over there the buckle factory. Right next to the corner was the harness shop, then the stables and across the street, Mrs. Donley's big,

brick boarding house. Further along was Mr. Evans' little store, Wayne's barber shop and then old Mr. Gruber's shoe-repair place. Yes, yes, he could remember them all. And then the nice residential streets, the brick sidewalks, the cool, shadowed front porches, screened by wisteria vines. Right here was Marley's house, then Keenan's, Hopemore's, Havey's . . . Yes, he remembered every one! As he walked along he thought he could hear the creak of front-porch swings. Did someone call to him out of the dusk? Mr. Octbur! Mr. Octbur! Or did he only imagine it?

He walked on and now the cold seemed to be settling in. The wind moaned dolefully; a scarf of sudden leaves swirled down the sidewalk and then abruptly disbursed like skirmishers. Somewhere nearly — in someone's garden yard? — he could hear the rasp and rustle of autumn corn stalks. A cricket chirped and then grew silent. What was happening?

What? Ah, he knew! Frost was settling in on the cold evening wind. It was coming down out of the cold sky, coming up out of the cold earth, and soon its silver would shine in the moonlight. The crickets would be stiffened into final silence, the corn stalks would freeze into whitened spikes which even the rising wind would no longer rattle.

It was like an evening he had known so many years ago, like an autumn evening out of vanished time, the same frosty moonlight silence pervading the old town. It seemed as if fifty years might be shrugged off like a fleeting dream, like an ephemeral interlude lost in the landscape of time.

Time and memory! And the key was his! He walked and remembered. The old town as he had known it returned in the eerie moonlight. The silent silver streets came back again. Gaslight gleamed in the houses. He heard the muted tinkle of pianos, voices mingled in harmony, the old songs come to life again!

He turned toward home. Past the old school, over the wooden railroad bridge and down the little hill. Yes, nothing was changed. There was the Madigan house, the Janmer house, the Chanrey place, then the empty lot and then . . .

Yes, it was still there, the old Octbur house, every brick still intact, gaslight shining in the front parlor, the sound of rather mournful music.

He went up the brick walk, up the wooden steps. Someone

opened the door and he stepped in.

THE NEXT DAY the Octburs told everyone he was a distant relative who had strayed back and that they were taking him in. He'd sit on the porch in the evening, in the cold autumn moonlight, with a shawl around his shoulders. During the day he'd stand by the gate and watch the brewery wagons rattle past.

He was content and at peace, although the Octbur household was not exactly a merry one. There had been tragedy, they told him, a long time ago.

One of the young Octbur boys had wandered off one cold autumn night and never returned. Yes, it was a long time ago. They had looked everywhere. Everywhere . . .

He wasn't sure about it himself, but he sometimes wondered; something about it puzzled him, nagged at him. Had they really looked *everywhere* — including the dim, kaleidoscopic corridors of vanished time, those haunted corridors he himself seemed to know so well?

Frowning, he'd sit on the porch and think about it, while the slow frost settled in . . .

The Dog That Laughed

by Charles Willard Diffin

From the time that *ASTOUNDING STORIES OF SUPER SCIENCE* first appeared until the Clayton Magazines went under, CHARLES WILLARD DIFFIN, so far as the all science-fiction and weird titles were concerned, was an exclusive with Harry Bates. *Spawn of the Stars* was the feature novelet in the second issue of *ASTOUNDING*, and *Two Thousand Miles Below* concluded in the next-to-last Clayton issue (February 1930 and January 1933 respectively). With *STRANGE TALES*, Diffin did better; the present story graced the first issue and his second appearance there was in the final issue. His last appearance was in 1935/36 with a four-part serial, *Blue Magic*. So far as we know, only one of his stories have been reprinted.

DOCTOR STROHGER'S experiments were weird, unbelievable, terrifying. They made trouble for me when I first knew of them; trouble enough, I thought at the time.

I was in college, majoring in chemistry, when I first knew "Old Strohger." He was an irascible codger, peculiar even then, a professor in the medical department, and he used to

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come over twice a week to give us chemistry students lectures on toxicology and kindred topics.

In appearance, he was tall and lean, his scanty gray hair always disordered, his sharp eyes boring into a fellow like a pair of blowtorches; and a wild look of almost maniacal anger would come into them when he was crossed in any way. It was no surprise to us when another year found the name of Professor Strohger quietly dropped from the teaching staff. But before that happened I had learned something more of the doctor.

I didn't know at first why he took a fancy to me. Certainly it was not because of my fondness for Marge Duncan. Marge was his niece. Doctor Strohger had brought her up since her parents had died, and she earned all he had given her, so everyone said. There were just the two of them, and Marge kept his house neat as wax, and did the cooking and housekeeping, all in addition to going to college. Yes, Marge earned her keep and then some, but the old doctor didn't fancy anyone interfering with Marge.

He seemed to like me, though, in spite of my frequent calls. Billy Prentiss and I were the only ones who could call on Marge. Prentiss was a junior medic and his competition didn't worry me. I didn't know we

were competing for the job of assistant to Strohger.

He asked me into his laboratory one night — he had a big room fitted up at his house — and it was the look in Marge's eyes that held me back for a moment when I would have followed the doctor from the room.

She was terrified; I could see that plainly. There weren't any good-humored crinkles about her big eyes, nor laughter down deep inside them; there was just fear. And I knew it was fear for me.

Only time for a whisper: "Don't let him, Jimmy — don't let him hypnotize you!" And the doctor's head poked back through the door to say irritably. "Well, young man, if you're coming, come!"

I went. But I gave Marge's hand a reassuring squeeze, and I was wondering — wondering about the doctor.

STROHGER — R. L. Strohger, M.D. — was a toxicologist, and yet Marge had said "hypnotism" and she was warning me against him. What had Strohger to do with hypnotism? . . . I was doing some plain and fancy thinking as I went into the laboratory.

"I thought you would be interested, Blaine," he told me, and motioned me to a chair. "You are different from the usual run of students; you

think for yourself. Sit down; I want to talk with you. And I may allow you to work with me in some research. You wouldn't mind picking up a little extra income, would you?"

Strohger knew that I was alone in the world and that I was working my way through college. "A little extra income!" That sounded good to me, and I told him so.

"Fine," he said; "I can use an assistant."

"Toxicology?" I asked, and grinned. "Don't want to experiment on me, do you?"

Smiles did not come easy to the hard, tight-lipped face of the doctor, but he managed one. "Yes, I may want you to lend yourself to an experiment or two, Blaine — but not toxicology. No, no. Nothing dangerous. That is my hobby, my real work."

He crossed the room and opened a door. The smell of animals came to me, and I saw boxes and cages through the doorway. I was suddenly interested. . . . But the thought of working with Dr. Strohger was not so attractive, though it would mean seeing more of Marge. I got one glimpse of Strohger as he came back; there was a dog struggling in his arms, and the look on the man's face was vindictive.

He snapped some shackles upon the animal's legs and had

it helpless in a moment; then he stroked it and made passes from its head, and the dog lay still. He opened the side of a metal case and put the dog inside.

I had been looking about; I had wondered about the big metal box with its connected apparatus: a maze of wiring, a Coolidge tube, other powerful lights with shutters and screens. Some of the apparatus about the room was familiar, but most of it was new to me, and appeared to have been made by the doctor himself.

"I will show you something," he told me. "I know that I need not define the psyche for you; you are intelligent; but you will be amazed at my findings. I have learned — much."

His fingers were touching here and there about the complication of coils and switches. A light blazed dazzlingly to vanish as he dropped a slide before it. The tubes were sputtering and glowing.

"An animal subject," the doctor was saying, "is not capable of giving the best results, but" — he paused to look through an eyepiece into the big case where the dog had been placed — "but look for yourself." He motioned me to the peep-hole of glass or quartz.

My eyes found nothing when first I looked, nothing but darkness. "I can't see a

thing," I told him; "it's absolutely dark."

"Quite the contrary," was his amazing reply; "the cabinet is flooded with light — dark light! Your eyes do not see it. It is a combination of both ultra-violet and infra-red, with some other radiations of my own devising."

I heard his sardonic chuckle behind me as I continued to stare, and abruptly I knew there was light in the cabinet.

Faint at first, it gathered slowly, a whirling mist of luminous vapor. In the utter darkness of the cabinet it shone with increasing brilliance, and now, by its light, I could see the body of the dog lying quiet, apparently dead, on the floor. But the vapor . . .!

It was quivering now with a tremulous vibration that told of infinite, finer vibrations within it. And, as I watched, the vapor slowly assumed the form of a *dog*. It was a thing of shimmering light, but, nevertheless, a dog, *the* dog, the very animal I could see upon the floor. A thread of violet light connected the phantom figure with the real body. The luminous thing became firm and lost its translucence. It was a dog, a living, breathing animal, and it looked at me with a hatred in its eyes that sent chills of fear to grip and quiver in my spine. Never, in eyes human or animal, have I seen

such implacable, ferocious hatred as this thing was directing at my eyes

I DREW back in apprehension, then pressed my face against the glass to stare the harder where another figure was showing. Dim, this one, and hazy, but presently I made out the bent figure of a man. There was no hatred in those eyes that gleamed pale in a pallid face. Only an imploring look; agonized, beseeching! And in that instant I recognized the face. And from this form, too, I saw a thread of violet light, that wavered to end in nothingness.

The face vanished, and the hand of Dr. Strohger pulled me away, while he asked: "It formed, did it not? The projected thought image of the dog!" He nodded with satisfaction at what he saw — the other face with its agonized eyes was gone — and the doctor switched off the instrument and motioned me again to my chair. I found it in a daze.

"What was it?" I managed to gasp; "what were they?"

"They?" The question was sharp; the tone cut through my blurred thoughts to warn me. I would say nothing of the second form.

"Two dogs," I offered in lame explanation; "one on the floor and the other — that ugly, beastly thing!" The shudder

that accompanied my exclamation was not assumed.

"That," said Dr. Strohger, complacently enough, "was the projected personality of the animal on the floor — or a part of it, to be precise. Animals, like humans, may have split personalities. And now let me explain. I did not mean to startle you; I could not foresee that it would be the ugly part of it that would show."

I didn't know much then of what he was saying; I wasn't in the best of condition for grasping his explanation, but I got something of "dual personalities — more than two at times — all in one person — separate them — project them into the vibratory zone where they are visible — actual entities . . ."

I broke in after a while to ask: "You can do this to people? And what is the idea of it all?"

"Yes, much better with a human subject," he told me; "and as to the object, we can learn to be of help to them, to straighten out their mental twists and obsessions, to liberate them from the internal conflict of opposing personalities."

I WAS WATCHING his eyes that did not look at me as he offered this explanation. I have always been sensitive to facial expressions, and I saw a flicker of the eyes that made a lie of his words. I remembered his ugly look when bringing in the

dog and I could see little of benefit to the subject who placed himself at Dr. Strohgers mercy.

"I would like to see the experiment," I told him.

"You shall," he assured me. "But now, how about yourself? Would you care to work with me on this?"

"As a subject?" I asked.

"Why, yes, at times; there is nothing unpleasant about it. Perhaps I may use a little hypnotism, with your consent, to break down the barriers of the conscious and reach what lies below. You would enjoy the experience. I could use you regularly — two or three times a week. And I will make it well worth your while."

He believed I was considering the proposal, and he smiled upon me in what he thought was the friendliest way.

"Sounds interesting," I said; "but can't you show me such a test — on someone else. How about the old man you have around here — Wilkins, isn't it? — I've seen him at your gardening. Can't we try it out on him?"

I had tried to make my voice casual, and I avoided meeting the sharp eyes that were boring into mine now. Then he covered that betraying look and answered.

"Impossible, I'm afraid. Wilkins was my best subject, but he died last week, poor old

chap" — the sympathy he was forcing into his voice made me writhe — "died of heart failure. I thought you knew."

"No, I didn't know," I said, "but I do now."

"Who signed the death certificate?" I asked, and looked squarely at him this time.

I will say this for the doctor: he never by so much as the twitch of a muscle betrayed what was going on behind those piercing eyes. He just hesitated a moment as he rose, and I set myself for an attack. Then he walked quietly to the door and opened it.

"You will leave this house," he said, "at once. And if you ever come back . . ."

"It will be with an officer," I told him, "and a warrant."

I was white hot with rage at the thought of being thrown out almost bodily like that! But through all my emotions and the wild thoughts of a youngster there shone clearly a face. It was dim and unreal, but the eyes were searching, imploring; and the face was that of old Wilkins who had died—of heart failure!

What was it? A vision? A phantom? A living entity projected by the mechanism of Dr. Strohger from the mind of that old man, reforming again in the zone of vibration to cry out for its body, severed by death? I have never answered the question. But that Strohger had

killed him I had not the least doubt.

After that, of course, I saw little of Marge. She was ordered never to see me nor speak to me again. She disobeyed the order once, long enough to tell me of it and to show me that she must obey. And I made myself plain to her. I was poor; this last year of college must be finished; then work and success would let me come for her. The answering look in her deep brown eyes struck mere words to futile silence.

SOON AFTER that, the name of Professor Strohger was dropped from the faculty list. Strohger vanished, and with him, Marge. Bill Prentiss left, too.

Two years, with never a word, and only the memory of the message of Marge's eyes. I never lost faith, and I still clung to hope, but I knew Marge was a prisoner of her uncle — and the two years were not pleasant.

One year of college and one in the laboratories of a steel mill were enough for me; the deadly routine procedure was stifling, and I struck out for myself. Norwalk had an opening, I believed; it was a secluded little town that was enjoying a boom and there were industries of various sorts locating there. There would be work for a free-lance chemist.

But there was another and more compelling reason why I had selected Norwalk. I had received a message — well, you could hardly call it that — but it was a postcard. It was addressed to me at the University, marked "Class of 1926", and the registrar had forwarded it.

There was just the address, and on the other side only one word: "Jimmy." Nothing else, but the unmistakable handwriting of Marge Duncan made my breath catch and choke me. I surmised that she had no chance to write more; and the card was marked with mud stains.

Someone had probably found it, and had mailed it despite the lacking message; and the postmark, though blurred, I felt sure, was "Norwalk".

I made inquiries, you may be sure; pestered the postmaster and the R.F.D. carriers, and the storekeepers too, but not a soul could I find who had heard the name Strohger, or knew of a household that answered the description. I couldn't find a lead. And that unfinished message — it was a call for help; I knew that Marge needed me.

Except for my work I would have worn myself out with worry, but I had made no mistake in the location. I got more work than I could handle and had to hire an assistant for the routine analyses. That forced me to keep myself busy until

five o'clock every day. Then I would take my little roadster and just cruise around. I covered every road and lane for miles about; it got so that I knew every rock and bump in the roads.

And every house! I sized them all up, looked, and wondered, as I looked, if this could be the place where Marge was waiting. I was almost sick with worry and too much work with not enough sleep — but I found the place.

There was a little cross-roads village, miles back from the railroad, and a lonely road that led off over the hills. Why anyone had ever built a big house back there, on that road, was a puzzle. But there it was, one of those old-time mansions of brick with a gambrel roof and long windows with heavy old-fashioned shutters; the whole thing was set back from the road in a big fenced yard that had been pretentious in its day. It was a tangle now of shrubbery, grown rank and tall grass, with a neglected driveway curving through. It gave me the shivers; it was so like a corpse, a mummy of what had been a home.

It was the dog that stopped me. He came out of the driveway and stood square in the center of the narrow road. He was a big police dog — the biggest brute I had ever seen, I thought — and he just stood

and looked at me, looked straight at my eyes.

I stopped the car. The dog was like a gray statue; it wouldn't move, and I hadn't room to pass on either side. It was all uncanny, this seemingly deserted house, the death-like stillness in the air, the growing darkness, and that big beast that walked silently out of the half open gate to stare and stare, with a fierce intensity in its unwinking eyes. Partly my nerves, I suppose, but I seemed to get something from him that sent a tingle of apprehension that was half expectation quivering along my spine. Then a whistle! It came from the house. And the dog's head dropped. He stood without moving for a moment till the whistle came again, sharp and commanding. It was pitiful to see the poor beast grovel. Head and tail down, he slunk back to the gate.

SOMEONE HAD come out of the door to stand on the little brick porch; someone tall and thin, and the wind was blowing his scanty, unkempt gray hair. I never bothered to open the door of the roadster; I went over the side and followed the dog. There wasn't much light, but I couldn't be wrong. I had too vivid a memory of the man to mistake him now, and I followed the cringing big beast where Doctor Strohger was waiting.

He didn't speak at first, and neither did I. We just stood there looking at each other. Taller than ever he seemed, and thinner, but there was no sign of weakness in him. He was all tense muscle as he glared at me as if about to spring; his eyes were more deep-sunk than ever, and the look in them wasn't welcoming, to put it mildly.

"I warned you once," he said, very quietly; "I told you not to come back."

I didn't bother with that. "Where's Marge?" I demanded. Things got a little blurry then; I was seeing red. "Where is she?" I asked. "I mean business."

He just laughed. "She isn't here."

"That's a lie."

And still he laughed.

"I'm here to get her," I told him; "I'm coming in."

He glanced once at the big dog that had slunk in behind him; he seemed to be considering something, I thought. I was ready to beat his head off that minute and break into the house.

"Marge," he told me finally, "is married. She married Prentiss. You remember Billy Prentiss in the medical department. She is not here. They are living out west."

"Another lie! Don't you ever speak the truth? I'm coming in," I told him; "I'll see for myself."

"Billy would tear your throat

out if I told him to," he said, and pointed to the dog. The beast crouched down behind him; the hackles on his neck stood up and his eyes were red in the half light. Here was something to reckon with. I hardly heard the cackling laugh of the doctor as he added, "I call him Billy; he's named for her husband."

THEN HE seemed to change his mind. "Get back," he told the dog, "into the house!" And to me: "Come right in, Mr. James Blaine; you honor me with your insistence." Surprisingly, he threw the door open, and I followed him into a hallway.

There was a lamp burning in a bracket on the wall, and another in the big room adjoining the one he led me into. There was no modern lighting system in this old house, just oil lamps. It made the big room a place of dancing shadows, but I saw enough to recognize the laboratory equipment and the big contrivance with its lights and tubes that I had seen before. Strohger's experiments, I thought. He had been continuing them here.

He read my thoughts. "Yes," he said; "the same line of research. Most interesting work—very! Though it is not so convenient in some ways. I make my own current for my machine—a gas engine and storage batteries that work very well."

"Not interested!" I told him. "You were lying out there. Where's Marge?"

He didn't answer, but just sat there and stared at me. The light shone in his eyes, and I remember they reminded me of the dog's; they blazed in their sockets, they fascinated me. That steady stare! It bothered me—confused me.

Then: "It was the truth," he said slowly in a low, steady tone. "I will prove it to you, and you will believe me—you will listen to me. . . . You will listen . . . you will listen to me,"—his voice seemed coming from far off—"you—will—listen . . . you—will—believe—me. . . ."

I remember how quiet the room was, how my wild, storming rage seemed melting away. And Strohger moved softly in the dim light to touch his fingers here and there about the apparatus in the corner. Big enough for a dog, I was thinking; big enough for Billy, huge as he was—big enough for a man!

"Look in here," Strohger was telling me quietly. "I have progressed with my experiments; I will show you Marge, or rather, her thought projection. Watch here as you did before, watch carefully."

Against my will, I peered into the big metal box.

The inside of the cabinet was dark—a darkness that was utter black—until a trickle of light came to life. It glowed bright-

er, not brilliant, until just a soft glowing light was vaguely outlined. Then that hardened to a sharp, shining point that held my eyes, and my eyes followed it; it held them and drew me after, while it faded off and off into a tremendous distance. . . . A voice was speaking to me, and it seemed to be coming from the light. "Sleep," I was being told; "sleep . . . sleep. . . ."

My nerves were all that saved me. I was keyed up; tuned like a string on a violin, it seemed—and the string snapped. I came to in an instant, and in the same instant I turned and swung.

But he knew it was coming—knew it the instant that I did—and he warded it off. There was no chance for another.

"Billy!" he screamed. "At him, Billy. Kill him!" And there I lost track of the doctor. The big brute was right on me, but I didn't go down. I smashed one fist to the head that shot up at my face. He leaped again as I backed through the door, and the big teeth clicked as they missed my throat by an inch.

There was a chair beside me in the hall. It was heavy; I wouldn't have swung it so easily under ordinary conditions. But I'm no lightweight myself, and I had more than human strength right then. I needed it. I met the dog's leap in mid-air, and the chair went to pieces in my hand.

I was in my car and tramping

on the starter when the beast came after me down the driveway. The doctor was behind him, and I didn't wait for any more. I switched on my lights and took off into the night as fast as I could shift the gears.

I was shaken, I'll admit it, and shaken by what the doctor had said as much as by what he had done. Marge married to Billy Prentiss! I couldn't believe it. I wouldn't!

A MILE or so away was a house — the nearest neighbor, too. I stopped short of that and turned around. I didn't want to meet anyone or see anyone; I just wanted to get back to that spooky old mansion and see what could be learned. I parked the car out of hearing, too, and went the rest of the way on foot.

The house looked twice as big and twice as lonesome when I crept toward it and went over the iron fence. I had found a stout club for a weapon in case the police dog was out, but there was neither sign nor sound of him as I crouched listening in the black darkness.

There wasn't much moon, and it was behind me shining on the near side of the house when the scud of clouds let it break through.

What was I looking for? I couldn't have told. I just wanted to learn more of the place and of what it might hold; and

I wanted desperately some word of Marge.

The good night odors of the country came to me; the peaceful quiet that only the country knows; and the rasp of crickets and the countless tiny sounds that make the silence of night so noisy when you really listen. And I was listening. I heard the sounds, and I heard when they stopped. There was something moving under the trees, moving toward me. There was not a whisper of warning from whatever it was; it was the silence of the crickets that marked its coming.

Then in an open place I saw it — a thing like an ape that shambled awkwardly, but in utter silence, through the dark. It moved clumsily on all fours, grotesquely, and I saw only a vague white shape, as it stopped to come up on its hind legs and sniff at the air.

A twig cracked, off at one side; there was something else. That made two of them now, though I didn't even glimpse the one that had made the noise. I merely gripped my club and waited.

Before the house was open ground which had probably been a lawn at one time, and across the open space was a big tree. The leaves were thick, and consequently I hadn't seen anything up there; but suddenly I saw something black drop from a branch. It landed in a heap,

then scrambled to its feet, and I thought it was another ape-thing — a black one this time — till the moon broke through to show the tall figure and blowing, frowzy hair of Doctor Strohger. And how that man ran! He made the front porch and grabbed for the door, and the things that had stalked me broke crashingly from their concealment to give chase. The big dog almost made it. It was the dog that I had heard, near me.

"Down, Billy, down!" the doctor was screaming, and the voice was like your own that you hear in some horrible dream when you are trying to escape. But the dog didn't, and the door was slammed just as he crashed against it. Behind him the white thing that had followed more slowly was slinking into the dark. The moon was gone behind the clouds, and I was mighty glad to scramble over the fence and put its iron bars between me and those nightmare things.

But I was puzzled. Doctor Strohger, treed! Only the fact that the beasts below him had come snuffling after me had allowed him to run for it. The ape-thing was too much for me, and I passed that problem up. But the dog! It was the same brute that had tried to kill me at the doctor's order. And now he was apparently as eager to



get his teeth into his master's throat.

HIS MASTER? . . . And then I understood. The doctor was no longer in command of these creatures; whatever hold the man had had over these brutes was broken. Something had slipped, and he was a prisoner in his own house. The slamming of shutters confirmed my belief. One after another, as fast

as the man inside could race from one window to the next, the shutters were slammed shut, and the windows of the whole ground floor were made fast against attack. And the ghastliest thing of all was to see the dog: he was trying to break in.

I saw him come up on his hind legs to claw and scratch

at the shutters; I could see the white marks where he tore the wood. He was as tall as a man, but the windows were high, and he worked as a man might work to force his paws beneath the tight slats. But he couldn't make it; they held fast; and then I saw him pacing back and forth across the open ground in front. The white thing, in the meantime, kept back under the trees—the beasts had forgotten me, it seemed—and they only growled and snarled at one another from time to time.

I gripped hard at my own arm to assure myself that I was there in the flesh and was seeing the things my eyes said were there.

I was screened from the open space before the front of the house, but what moon there was must have made me plainly visible from the side, and I knew after a bit there was something moving there. The lower windows on that side were all sealed fast with their black shutters, and one window on the second floor was the same. I remembered it had been that way before. But now the little movable slats of those upper shutters were opened, and something white, like a ribbon, was being lowered and swung from side to side.

The doctor was signalling me. That was my first thought, until I knew better. And I didn't breathe for a minute or so when

I realized what it really meant. It was Marge, locked up there, and she was lowering something where I could see.

The fence couldn't keep me out then, but I crept as silently as the animals to a distant point where I could go over the top of the sharp iron pickets and work up toward the house.

I reached for the ribbon and tugged on it, and my hand closed on something that sparkled at the end of the white cord. Enamel and gold, it was, when I looked at it, with Greek letters and some little diamonds set about. My own fraternity pin I had given Marge so long ago!

I couldn't keep still. "Margel" I called softly. "Marge, my dear!"

There was a commotion up there behind the blinds and the cackling laughter of old Doctor Strohger. "They'll kill him," I heard him say. And then Marge screamed.

"Run, Jimmy!" she told me. "They are out; they will kill you!"

I had my club, and I stood there long enough to answer. "I'm coming in," I said; "I'll save you." But she pounded at the shutters and then calmed her voice to speak distinctly.

"No, no! I am safe here; I am safe, Jimmy. Go quickly, dear, but come back." I didn't have time to hear any more. A white thing was leaping through the

tangle of bushes, and the dog was a swift black shadow that kept pace with it.

The white ape beat me to it; it was between me and the fence, crouched animal-like for a spring. It was growling and snarling, and I was rigid with horror as the moon flashed out to show me the thing that was springing at me. I heard animal snarls, but they came from human lips in the face of a man, a distorted twisted face. It would have got me, for I couldn't move when the figure of that naked, open-jawed man leaped like an animal for my throat. I felt the brush of stiff hair as a black body went past; and I saw the big dog for an instant as it met the man in mid-air to go crashing back in a fighting, snarling whirl where the bushes hid them — all but the beastly, inhuman noise.

Then I ran, and I never quit till I reached the car where I had left it.

IT WAS NOON when I awoke. Who would think that a man could sleep after an hour like that? I hardly knew how I drove home; I went to my room, and threw myself on the bed. I was completely exhausted, and I wanted to think. But all I could know was that I had found Marge, and she was safe for the present. I guess it was that that let me forget the horrors.

I rushed to my office as soon as I knew where I was; there was a gun in the desk, and I was going to need it.

"The coroner's been looking for you," my assistant told me. "He's been in a dozen times in the past two hours."

"Tomorrow," I said; "I'll see him tomorrow," and I jammed the pistol in my pocket; I had other business that day. But the coroner caught me as I was leaving.

He wouldn't listen to my protests. "I've got to see you right now," he told me, and stuck a bottle into my hand.

"Nothing doing," I tried to explain. I liked old Doc Powell, lean, weather-beaten old fellow, with the marks of forty years of sun and storm from his rounds as a general practitioner through all these hills. I had run a few analyses for him — blood-count and such as that — but I wasn't waiting now.

And I couldn't explain. I had thought of getting help — going for the sheriff or someone like that — but that wouldn't do. They would have locked me up as insane with what I would have told them. And I couldn't get a search-warrant on the strength of a wild tale and a fraternity pin. No, I would have to see it through alone, and the less publicity the better for Marge, without a doubt.

"I can't do it," I told the coroner; "I've got to go."

"You will do it. There's a man been killed, or so I reckon."

He had me by the arm. "Where are you off to in such an all-fired hurry, son?" he asked.

I didn't know what to say, so I told the truth. "Hale's Corners," I told him; "or out beyond."

"Not the old Steadman road?" he asked.

I had seen the name on a battered sign. I nodded to him and tried to break away, but he hung on.

"Nothing out there," he said, eyeing me; "nothing but the old Steadman place. Going there? To that old place that sets back from the road, and looks kinda gone to seed?"

"What of it?" I was getting mad now. I was wild to get back there, and Marge was waiting. "Doctor Strohger lives there," I said; "I've got to see him."

"He hasn't gone by that name," said the coroner. "Now set!" he commanded and pushed me into a chair. "You ain't in such a rush as you think. That's where the body was found."

A body! Marge! I had a bad minute or two; then I remembered what he had said: that it was the body of a man.

"A naked body," said the

coroner slowly, "and it had been chewed up some, too. But that wasn't what killed the man and dropped him out there in the road. When I see a backbone twisted like its two ends are trying to meet, it means just one thing. Now you test this from his stomach, and test it for strychnine. Then we'll see about your errand out there, Mr. Blaine."

I made a qualitative for him. Lord knows how I found the right reagents, but the color flashed up in the solution, and there wasn't a doubt what it meant.

"Strychnine," I told him; "and enough to kill a horse."

I saw it all like a flash: the white ape-man and the dog; and the man had got it. "It was an accident," I said; "it wasn't meant for him."

The doctor sat up straight in his chair, and he aimed a finger at me as if it was the pistol in my pocket.

"Accident!" he said. "Accident! Yes, there are places where strychnine goes as an accident, and cyanide, and shooting, too. But not in this county, young man; not while I'm the coroner."

He motioned me to a chair. "I like you, Blaine," he told me, "I like you first rate. And I think you're all right in this matter; but you've got some explaining to do. Set right there and tell me all you know."

IT WAS A relief to have someone to tell it to. And then I went with the doctor down to the undertaker's where the body had been brought.

I remembered the wild animal that had leaped for me in the night — a beast in the shape of a man; I was looking for that. I never expected to look at the face, calm and peaceful now, of Bill Prentiss. But there he was, changed somewhat. There were lines in his face that hadn't been there before, but it was Prentiss — Billy Prentiss — and I knew now it was this that had sprung murderously at my throat.

And the dog had saved me; I had hardly thought of that, but I wondered at it now. The dog! It had tried to kill me before when Strohger controlled it. And then, freed from that control, it had saved me from Prentiss, or the man-beast that he had been back there in the dark.

"It's too much for me," I told the coroner. "I get the straight of some of it — not much, but some — but I know this: Marge Duncan is out there, and she's in danger. I'm going, and I'm going now."

"You bet we are," said the coroner, and he beat me to his car. He got a pistol from a pocket in the car-door, I noticed, and put it on his hip. I patted my own pocket, and he nodded.

NOT A SIGN of life about the big house as we drove up. Just the warm sun beating down on everything, and the smell of hot grass, and cicadas sawing away at their summer song. It didn't seem possible that the nightmare story I had told could ever have been true. The coroner must have felt it, too, for he looked at me curiously as we drove up. But I pointed to a strip of white ribbon hanging and blowing gently below a shuttered window, and his look changed.

There was no white anything in the tangled briars — that was only a twisted body now in the undertaker's rooms — nor was there any sign of the dog. We went past the shuttered windows and onto the porch to knock loudly on the door.

It wasn't until I shouted that the door opened a crack, and the face of Doctor Strohger showed in the opening. He was ready to slam the door shut, but his face lost its look of terror when he saw us.

"This is Doctor Powell, the coroner," I said; "we've come to talk to you. Open that door."

The eyes narrowed a bit I thought, but Doctor Strohger was almost courteous as he let us in. He bolted the door though when he closed it.

"Right in here," he said, and led the way to the room I had seen the day previous, "and then perhaps you will tell me

why I have the honor of this professional call."

It was in there. The hall lamp was not lighted, and the shuttered windows made the place a vault; there was lamp-light from the inner room, though. I waited just a minute. I had heard the rattle of the engine in the coroner's old car, and it was in my mind to go back and shut it off. It was an involuntary action. I slid the bolt and started to open the door; then I changed my mind and went toward the lighted room.

It didn't take long for the coroner to state his case.

"He was found near here," he told Strohger at last; "just down the road a piece, and I understand that the man was staying with you. Mr. Blaine is authority for the statement that there was strychnine in his stomach. I say he died of it."

Doctor Strohger leaned back comfortably in his chair and made clucking sounds with his tongue. "Too bad," he said; "most unfortunate, and nobody in the least to blame. Yes, I put out the poisoned meat, but I meant it for the dog. And it was Prentiss who ate it. Yes, yes!"

"What in the devil have you been doing?" demanded the coroner. "What kind of witch's brew do you concoct to make men and animals act like this?"

Doctor Strohger waved a deprecatory hand. "Witchcraft?"

he said. "Oh, no, my dear Doctor! Nothing like that. You are familiar, I assume, with some of the findings of the modern psychologists. You doubtless keep up with your reading along those lines, and you will understand something of my experiments. I have been doing some research work, as our young friend knows" — he bowed toward me — "research into the subliminal mental states. I have been working with animals. Young Prentiss was my assistant.

"That Prentiss attacked this young man, Blaine, I have my doubt; Prentiss was an exceptionally capable assistant. But I had the dog under hypnosis — I had held him there for some months in fact — and I had left him in Prentiss' care. He allowed the dog to escape, that is all. And though I knew Prentiss was outside there trying to rectify his error and recapture the dog, I felt doubtful of his success and I thought it best to attempt to poison the beast. Why Prentiss touched it is more than I can explain."

"Perhaps Marge Duncan can help us to understand," I said, and I got to my feet. "Now you take me to Marge, you lying devil, and if anything's happened to her . . ." The expression on my face would have finished the sentence, but Doctor Strohger was not looking at me or hearing what I said.

He was half out of his chair, tense and listening. Then I heard it, too — the soft pad of animal feet in the hall.

"You left that door open!" The words of Strohger were a scream. "You damned, blundering . . ." He had leaped to slam the door into the hall. There was another that opened into a passage to a staircase. And Doctor Strohger, while for an instant we stood petrified, made a wild leap from the room, and his feet were pounding on the stairs.

A SCRAMBLING clatter echoed from the room beyond — claws ripping at a board floor — as an animal stopped its wild rush where it had circled through an adjoining room. I saw it before me; it tore at the flooring in frantic haste. It was the big gray-bodied police dog, and it bounded in tremendous leaps up the stairs, where Doctor Strohger was battering at a closed door.

I made the stairs in about three jumps myself, and my gun was in my hand; the coroner, I knew, was behind me. I saw the door open to let the tall form of Strohger crowd through, and I saw the final spring that carried a gray body in upon him.

Marge's screams were in my ears as I followed. I saw her dimly for an instant, flattened

against the wall, and in that whirling moment I knew that she was safe. Then I saw what was happening on the floor. And as fast as I could pull the trigger I fired at the gray mass that was tearing with dripping fangs at the throat of a screaming, struggling man.

It was the coroner who smashed open the shutters to let sunshine in upon the scene of blood and horror. And it was the coroner who was first at the side of the mangled man. I was busy supporting a white-faced girl who clung to me in terror that was a culmination of two years' experience.

Marge Duncan! I didn't know how much I loved her till I held her safe and close. And through all the frenzy of that moment there was just one thought uppermost in my mind. I had to know.

"Marge," I asked, "did you — were you and Billy married?"

The look in her eyes was enough; I held her tighter. "It was your uncle who said it," I told her; "I never believed . . ."

The coroner was kneeling beside Strohger; his quick fingers were pressing a handkerchief into the center of the spurting blood, but he caught my eye and shook his head to show that it was hopeless. "The dog has done justice," he said gravely; "this man will never live to hang for the man he killed."

Doctor Strohger was breathing, a noisy, horrible breath; he was dying there before us, but he managed to speak from that mangled throat, to speak in a whisper that gasped and bubbled hideously.

"I never — killed him. It was — only — the dog — that I killed." He raised a shaking hand that pointed at me, and he cackled that damnable laugh of his. "Blaine — killed Prentiss — killed him — just now . . ."

We looked at each other in amazement, the coroner and I. It was Marge who gave us the answer.

"He — he changed them," she whispered, "changed them about." I felt her trembling against me. "He's been working on them for months. He locked me up here when I said that I would tell. He split their personalities, he told me; liberated the dominant self of each,

and he put the mind — the soul — of Prentiss into that dog and the dog's mind into the man."

I looked at Strohger. His eyes that gleamed fiercely through the very veil of death gave dreadful confirmation to the truth, and he added in that ghastly whisper: "Interesting — very!" But it was the dog who supplied the last unspoken words.

He had been lying there — dog or Prentiss! — God knows what. I had thought he was dead. But he raised his head with a final effort to look squarely into the face of Doctor Strohger. The animal lips curled back and up in a beastly grin; there were sounds that came choking from his throat.

No, I know that a dog can't laugh — but this one did. It looked straight into the shrinking face of the mangled, dying man, and it laughed and laughed, until the end.



Ah, Sweet Youth

by *Pauline Kappel Prilucik*

(author of *The Girl at Heddon's*)

In her second story for us, PAULINE KAPPEL PRILUCIK employs a somewhat lighter touch than she used before, in order to give a fresh feeling to a not entirely unfamiliar theme. Mrs. Prilucik is a teacher, a member of the Mystery Writers of America, and has appeared in ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE.

THE ALARM rang. It was 7:15. Mr. Bindle pried himself away from the sheets and sat up on the edge of the bed. Well, it was another day; he was one day older again.

His wife, Emma, screeched up from the foot of the stairs, "Harry? Harry? Are you up? I don't hear you moving."

"I'm up. I'm up!" Harry Bindle groaned and hoisted himself forcefully to his feet. He stepped into his slippers and shuffled over to the dresser mirror.

It would have been practically impossible for Harry to begin his day without this scrutiny of his face in the mirror. He had done it every morning of every day since he was eighteen years old and first had aspirations of becoming a Hollywood actor.

Harry leaned over the dresser and fingered the ever-thickening mesh of tiny wrinkles around his eyes. His hairline was receding a bit, but proper brushing and massage might still salvage his appearance. And after

all, maturity was no handicap; surely the movies were scouting for the mature, romantic type all the time. Hollywood needed maturity — maturity and talent.

Emma's voice severed Harry's reverie. "Harry! Harry Bindle, where are you? Your eggs are getting cold."

Harry picked up the brush, flipped the hair forward over his extensive temples, then, with a skillful flick of the wrist, brushed down. Alakazam, alakazoom! He looked fine. No one could detect his fleeing hairline.

"Harry. . ." wailed Mrs. Bindle desperately from below.

"Coming, coming. . ." Harry hurried into the bathroom to dress.

WHEN HE got downstairs, Emma shook her head in exasperation. "I can guess where you've been whiling away the time. Harry, looking in that mirror all day isn't going to make you younger. After all — forty-five is forty-five!"

"I'm forty-four!"

"You'll be forty-five in three weeks."

"So? I'm still forty-four!"

"Oh Harry. . ." Emma sat down across the breakfast table from him and poured the coffee. "I wish you'd forget all this nonsense about a movie career. We've lived in Los Angeles now for fifteen years and nothing has happened. Nothing is going to;

I wish you'd get that through your head."

"I may still get discovered."

"In a shoe store?"

"Even Talent Scouts need shoes. You read about people being discovered in all sorts of crazy places: grease pits, hotel kitchens, florist shops, airplane restrooms. . . Why not in a shoe store?"

Emma laid her hand on Harry's arm. "Because, darling. . ." and her voice softened ". . . you're getting too old."

Harry raised an eyebrow in annoyance. "You don't know anything about the industry."

Emma shrugged and drank her coffee. "Maybe not, but I know you're a good shoe salesman, Harry. Everyone says you have a real knack for selling people the kind of shoes that are just right for them. That's a talent, too, and most people don't have it. Can't you just be happy selling shoes?"

Harry looked at her disdainfully over his eggs and commented dryly, "You don't understand."

HARRY ALWAYS walked to work in the morning; the shoe store was six blocks away, and he felt that the exercise kept his muscle tone in good condition. He had to admit, though, now that fall was merging into winter, these cold mornings left the muscle tone of his back and

legs a little stiff — and crotchety.

Harry sold thirty-six pairs of shoes that day. The store manager, Mr. Hicks, commended him for his fine selling ability. He laid his arm across Harry's shoulder and announced with pride that Harry was the best shoe salesman in the whole Los Angeles Chain. Harry smiled condescendingly. *It was nothing*, he thought privately, *not for a man of true finesse and charm. You're lucky to get me between engagements.*

On the way home from work each evening, it was Harry's practice to stop at Sophie's Bar and Grill for a cocktail. All the regulars were already planted on their accustomed bar stools, their ties loosened, their jackets unbuttoned. They were laughing.

Big, fat, red-faced Sophie, wearing a dark green paisley house-dress was behind the bar. "Hello, Harry. The regular?"

He nodded.

Joe Handle, chief accountant at his father's jewelry store, rubbed his hands together and laughed.

"Sophie was just telling us about an old woman who lives up in the hills near Brown Bass Falls and makes potions—magic potions!"

Sophie pushed a Manhattan Cocktail with two cherries skewered on a toothpick towards

Harry. "You believe in magic, Harry?"

He shook his head.

"Well, of course, neither do I," continued Sophie. "But I heard Elsie Baker tell Sarah Cull that when Martha Eberling wanted a baby (you know how long she and Ed had been married and nothing happened) . . . well, Martha went up to this old witch woman and bought a baby potion. Now you can believe it or not — but the very next month she was expecting!"

Joe Handle grinned and asked, "Who took the potion — Martha or Ed?"

"I don't know," snapped Sophie. "But it don't matter a bit as long as the results were there. And not only that," she continued, warming to the subject, "she has all kinds of potions that lots of people know for a fact *really* work! Love potions, health potions, potions to stay young — all kinds!"

"That's silly," said Joe. "No one in his right mind believes in potions; that sort of stuff went out in the Middle Ages!"

"Maybe — maybe not," replied Sophie mysteriously.

Harry finished his drink and hurried home. He suddenly felt hungry.

THE ALARM RANG. Through the half-open slit of one eye, Harry saw it was already 7:15. Time seemed to be racing by him like a tidal cur-

rent. He made his staggering journey to the mirror and noticed with dismay that the rapid flight of time did not decrease the toll. Each morning his face showed the ravages of having lived another day; it was depressing.

That afternoon at Sophie's he ordered a double Manhattan. Sophie looked at him suspiciously from under the puffy, inflated lids of her sultry eyes. "Rough day?"

Harry nodded and looked around the barroom. "Where is everybody?"

"Didn't you hear? Albert Mahoney passed away this morning. Everybody went down to the funeral parlor."

"Albert Mahoney! He hadn't been sick, had he?"

"Not that anyone would have guessed, that's for sure. He always looked fine, didn't he? ... Never looked a day over thirty-five. How old do you think he was?"

Harry shrugged. "I don't know. Around forty, I guess."

"Nope!" Sophie slapped the bar with the flat of her hand. "He was fifty-two!"

"No!" Harry's eyes regarded her incredulously.

"Yes." Sophie poured herself a straight whiskey and tossed it into her mouth with a practiced hand. She stared vacantly into space above Harry's head. "You can never tell how long a man has. That's one thing I learned

today. You take someone who looks fine every day of his life and . . . poof! He up and dies. And . . ." Sophie laughed and patted Harry familiarly on the back . . . "You take a guy like yourself, Harry . . ." She laughed again and paused to take another swig of her private stock that she kept hidden under the bar. "Why — a guy like you — who always looks like he might be on his last leg, well . . . you'll probably live to be a hundred!"

"Last leg?" repeated Harry numbly.

"Ah, I'm just kidding, Harry. Can't you take a joke?"

Harry mustered whatever was left of his self-adoration to maneuver a sheepish grin onto his face.

"Say, Sophie . . ." Harry paused to rephrase the question correctly in his mind. "That nonsense the fellows were talking about yesterday — where's that old hag live?"

"You're not interested in one of her potions, are you?" howled Sophie.

"No. No!" Harry felt his face flush. "I was telling Emma about it last night and she wondered — that's all. Never mind; it's not important."

"Well, I don't even know exactly. You understand I got this all second hand. But, as I understand it, she must live in a shack about two miles south of the falls. I never saw her place;

to tell the truth — I don't even know for sure if it's *really* there."

"It's not important — not important at all."

Sophie smiled wisely and toasted him with another swig from her bottle.

AFTER supper Harry told Emma there was a meeting of the Citizens for Better Government Committee of which he was secretary; he backed the car out of the garage and drove toward Brown Bass Falls.

It was dark by the time he reached the falls. He hoped this old bugaboo, whoever she was, would have a light burning, otherwise he'd never be able to spot the shack.

He drove about two miles past the falls, his headlights biting feebly into the misty darkness. Ahead, the empty black ribbon of road unraveled uninvitingly before him. Harry's sense of adventure gradually subsided into a strong, uncomfortable state of foreboding. He felt giddy — afraid! His hands trembled on the steering wheel. *A ridiculous hoax!* he thought; he decided to make a U-turn and go back.

The glare of the headlights lit up a narrow, dirt road branching off the main road. He slowed down and nosed into it. He put the car in reverse and began to back out. Then he saw a light about a hundred yards deep into the woods, dim and flick-

ering irregularly through the brush and fluttering leaves. He turned off the motor and got out of the car.

There was no path leading to the shack. He stumbled along, half crawling, half climbing, feeling his way through the underbrush and nettles. A few times he heard the rasping tear of fabric. He knew by the time he reached his destination he would look like a sadly overplayed version of Robinson Crusoe.

There was an uneasy, uncanny silence enveloping the old shack. Harry hesitated; all he heard was the wild thumping of his heart and the tremulous twanging of his nerves.

The door of the shack swung open with an eerie whine and a tiny, high-pitched voice called out, "Come in. Come in. I'm at home."

Harry swallowed hard, twice, then mounted the ramshackled, sloping porch. He looked through the door into the room; it was unexpectedly tidy. Long, makeshift shelves lined the walls. They were filled with hundreds of carefully labeled, meticulously dusted mason jars. The room was furnished with cast-off household relics that had been polished to a magnificent sheen by someone who apparently had a sheer love of industry.

In the corner farthest from the door sat a shriveled old

prune of a woman wrapped in an oft-mended shawl. Her face was a tangled maze of wrinkles and contradictions. She looked like the popular image of a witch, but she wore a marvelously benevolent smile. Her eyes pierced the darkness with iridescent yellow pupils like a cat's, yet they beamed kindly on Harry. Her ancient, shriveled fingers trembled as she clutched her shawl; yet the muscles of her wrist flexed, suggesting incredible hidden strength.

HARRY SHUDDERED; he felt as if his tongue were coated with bearskin. "W...well," he stammered. "I . . . I w...wanted to ask about a particular . . . medicine . . . er . . . ahem . . . potion."

"Ask! Ask!" cackled the old woman. "I have potions. I have potions for everything." She sprang to her feet with such suddenness that Harry tumbled back against the door jamb.

"Are you in love?" She pointed a long, knarled finger at him. "I have potions for love. I have potions for courage, for intelligence, for confidence, for beauty! Name it! Name what you need!"

Harry swallowed hard again. "I want youth. I want a potion to make me young again!"

"Well," chuckled the old crone. "I don't know . . ."

Harry stepped closer. "You mean you don't have a potion

like that?" A wave of frustration surged over him.

"Well," she speculated slowly, "I do. I just don't know if I should let you have some."

"Why not? Is it dangerous?"

"No." The old sorceress rubbed her stubbly chin thoughtfully. "No — it's not dangerous — not if you follow directions."

"Is it expensive?"

"Could you pay me two crates of oranges?"

Harry's mouth dropped open and his eyes grew wide. "You mean all you want is oranges? No money?"

"I never go into town. I can't spend money out here. Is that too much?"

"No, of course not. Of course not!"

"All right. It's a bargain then."

The woman shuffled across the room and studied the jars on the shelf. Finally she selected a jar that was filled with purple pills. "Do you have an envelope?"

Harry dug through his pockets and found his telephone bill. He ripped it open, crumpled the contents, and handed her the envelope. One by one she dropped five purple pills into it.

"Take two the first night before going to sleep. Take one the second night, and then, one every three weeks after that."

She gave him the envelope and returned to her chair in the far corner of the room. "And

don't forget to send me the oranges."

"Yes, yes, I will — I'll send them. Thank you. Thank you!" Harry fumbled and stumbled his way to the door and out into the woods again. He fairly flew over the brambles back to the car.

Upon reaching home, he did not even bother to put the car in the garage; he didn't want to wake Emma with the grating sound of the garage door lifting. He rushed inside, and before taking off his coat, ran into the kitchen and swallowed two pills. He gulped the water greedily. The water dribbled down his chin. He wiped his mouth with the kitchen towel and hurried upstairs to bed.

AT SEVEN-FIFTEEN the alarm rang. Harry bounced out of bed. He felt wonderful! He skipped to the mirror, looked at his face, and hugged himself in delight. There was no mistaking the change; he looked at least ten years younger!

At breakfast Emma kept sneaking glances at him. Finally, as he was about to leave for work, she said, "I don't know Harry — something is different about you today. You look . . . I don't know . . . handsome — younger!"

"I feel young!" He lifted Emma bodily and swung her around. He trotted out of the front door. "I feel young!"

The day that followed was a delight. Harry was showered with compliments on his appearance. He, in turn, radiated charm and good-will. He sold fifty-four pairs of shoes. A record breaker! After work he went to the Farmer's Market and ordered two cases of oranges to be delivered to the old witch up at Brown Bass Falls.

On the way home he viewed himself in every clean shop window. There was no end to the possibilities that a man who possessed the gift of youth could achieve. A few more pills and he might become young enough to play the part of romantic hero, feverish lover—the sheik! Harry squeezed his eyes shut with delicious pleasure and pinched himself. He wanted to be sure it was real — that *he* was real. With a sigh of relief he found he was!

Emma had cooked him a delicious pot roast — the kind he liked best and had not gotten in five years. He ate ravenously, smoked a long-forbidden cigar, and even dared to give Emma a suggestive little pat on the rump. He was a man reborn, completely rejuvenated; he decided to send the old woman two more crates of oranges next week. What a wonderful old woman!

That night Harry put on his pajamas early and he took one pill out of the envelope. He sat down on the edge of the bed

with the glass of water in his hand.

It was amazing! Ten years wiped away with two pills. Probably five years a pill, he deduced. Five years blotted out with every pill. What a discovery! He fingered the purple pill lovingly.

AGAIN HIS MIND clicked with numbers, years, flicking away like ashes in the wind. By the time he finished taking these pills he would be twenty again. Twenty — in six weeks time; truly incredible! He would get a second chance. He would be able to start life again at a precious age with all the accumulated experiences of almost forty-five years at his disposal. What a beginning! He could almost see his name blinking in large letters in the lights of some Hollywood marquee. He couldn't help but hit it this time. All the odds were on his side. He'd make it for sure.

Of course the metamorphosis was not without its problems. There were sure to be some comments about his mysterious rejuvenation. There were always the envious, spiteful people who would try to make trouble, but this time around no one was going to get the better of him. After all, he wouldn't be just another punk kid; he'd be a fascinatingly mature man with an amazingly youthful look. A look young enough to have a touch

of magic in it! Magic! How the word thrilled him! Now that he had had a personal brush with mysticism, he felt himself a true initiate into the world of magic. It didn't frighten him a bit. Instead it gave him strength — hope! How could he fail?

Though, ruminated Harry sullenly, there would be the problem of Emma, too. People might make an issue about his having such a dowdy, middle-aged wife; and Emma herself might fuss a bit, too. After all, the difference would be so obvious. Well, possibly he could get some pills for Emma. The old woman had had a whole jar of purple pills, and Emma hadn't been such a bad looker when she was young.

Still — what had really held him back all his life? What had tied him down — kept him from risking everything for a chance? Emmal Yes . . . Emma was mostly to blame for his failure. He had had as much (if not more) to offer the film industry in the way of talent and personality than most.

Emma's appearance might change, he brooded, but her philosophy of life would always be the same. She was timid, dogged, she had no flare. Her ideal was security — no matter how petty and flat — security and *oblivion*. No — with Emma he would fall into the same pitfalls again; she clearly stood in his way. Better to make a com-

plete break from the old life. If he wanted to succeed he'd *really* have to start all over. There was no point in dragging the useless chattel of this life into his new career. Emma would have to go!

Everything being neatly fitted into place, and at least superficially solved, Harry lifted the pill to his lips. His arm faltered halfway and dropped to his lap again.

Six weeks was quite a long time to have to wait. It would probably prove to be the longest six weeks in his entire life. If only he didn't have to waste all that time. Fall was really the best season to crash the Hollywood dramatic scene; all the biggest companies were casting now. Six weeks might cost him the greatest opportunity of his entire career.

Harry scratched his temple thoughtfully. Why not speed up the process? Why not go all the way and rub out the excess years now — tonight. This very instant! There were three pills left; fifteen years could be erased just like that.

Harry's fingers groped for the envelope with the remaining pills. His smug face lost its luster for a moment. What had the old woman meant by "dangerous"? Harry shrugged uncomfortably. The first two pills had had no adverse effects. He was not allergic to them; he was sure of that. Maybe she had

thought he would break out in hives or something like that — But he had felt fine this morning; it was silly to worry. If he had felt this spectacular after the first two pills, imagine how he would feel tomorrow after the remaining three!

This is the time to show my metal. Harry reassured himself. *This is the time to prove to myself that I'm a man of action—a man of positive drives and forceful thinking.*

He let the pills tumble into his hand without further hesitation. He dumped the pills into his mouth and quickly gulped some water. Smiling with deep, inner pleasure, he stretched out in bed and drew the covers up around his chin and fell asleep.

THE ALARM RANG. It was 7:15. Harry bounded out of bed. The virility, the vitality, the vigor he felt was magnificent! He could not wait to get to the mirror and examine the results.

He loped across the cold floor to the dresser, his heart fluttering wildly in the cage of his breast. Young again! The clock had been turned back, he exulted. He, Harry Bindle, had cheated *Time!*

Harry drew close to the mirror and blinked. He blinked again and again. He rubbed his eyes. A trick! Someone who knew that he looked at himself in this mirror each day had

played some kind of silly trick on him. Emma — Of course it must have been Emmal Just the kind of crazy, silly thing she would do to try to teach him a lesson.

Harry hurried into the bathroom and switched on the light. He ran to the medicine cabinet and glared into the mirror. He drew back horrified. More tricks — This was going too far! Harry began whimpering nervously and clutching the lapels of his red and white pajamas in panic.

It couldn't be; it wasn't possible — but it was happening right here in front of his eyes! There *it* was — clutching the lapels of *its* red and white striped

pajamas too. There *it* was — staring back at him from the silvery surface of the mirror! An *ape* — hairy, gaping, foolish looking, its simian face distorted in terror, nostrils flaring, eyes agape!

It's imitating me, gasped Harry, his brain reeling. *It's making fun of me!*

Harry raised his hand to blot out the mocking image — and then he screamed!

His hand was its hand! He, Harry Bindle, was the ape! And it was not even a young ape — but an old, wizened, ugly ape with warts on his face and balding pate. He screamed and screamed his horrible animal scream till it disintegrated into a grotesque, sobbing chuckle.



The Man Who Never Was

by R. A. Lafferty

In days gone by, when an editor discovered a new writer, he could induce him to sign an exclusive contract, in some instances. Nowadays, that hardly ever happens — with magazines, anyway. But an editor can still have the pleasure of seeing his discovery blossom out all over; and thus it is here. R. A. LAFFERTY sent me two stories around 1959 and one of them appeared in the January 1960 issue of SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, *Day Of The Glacier*. The second one appeared in FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION not too long after. Between then and now, Lafferty has been seen in just about all the science fiction and fantasy titles worth being seen in; we're delighted to have him back, and hope to present him to you in our companion magazines, FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION and STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES.

"I'M A FUTURE kind of man," Lado said one day. "And I believe there are other men appearing with new powers. The world will have to accept us for what we are."

"Bet it don't," said Runkis.

This began with Raymond Runkis sniping at Mihai Lado

the cattle dealer. "You are a double-decked, seven-stranded, copper-bottomed, four-dimension liar!" Runkis roared out that day.

"Yes, I know," Lado said. He was pleased when praised for his specialty. He was the best liar in the neighborhood, and

had the most fun out of it. But Runkis didn't let it go at that.

"Lado, you never told the truth in your life," he said loudly.

"Tell you what I'll do, Runkis," Lado said, and his eyes got that double look in them, "You pick any lie I've ever told, anything I've ever guded you about, and I'll make it come true. That's an open offer."

We began to pay attention then.

"There's a thousand to choose from," Runkis said. "I could make you produce that educated calf you brag about."

"Is that the one you pick? I'll whistle him up in a minute."

"No. Or I could call you on the cow that gives beer, ale, porter, and stout each from a separate teat."

"You want her? Nothing easier. But it's only fair to warn you that the porter might be a little too heavy for your taste."

"I could make you bring that horse you have that reads Homer."

"Runkis, you're the liar now. I never said he *read* Homer; I said he *recited* him. I don't know where that pinto picked it up."

"You said once you could send a man over the edge, make him disappear completely. I pick that one. Do it!"

"I wouldn't want to send a man away, Runkis."

"Do it, Lado. You're called.

That's one lie you can't make come true. Pick a man and make him disappear. We want to watch."

"All right," Lado said. "It will take a couple of days, but you can watch all of it. Sure, I'll send a man over the edge."

This Lado was a funny fellow. He paid for everything in cash and he made up his mind so quick that he scared you. He was the smartest cattle buyer in the Cimarron valley, a big, ruddy, freckled man, but he didn't look like a country boy. He had those crazy eyes that didn't grow around here; he was like one man looking out through the face of another like a mask.

"I've left more than one town and more than one name behind me," he had told us one day. "I'm a new kind of man with new powers. I don't use them much, but they grow on me. There's a few of us scattered out. We will either have to accommodate, or the world will."

"Bet it don't said Raymond Runkis.

Lado put little Mack McGoot to sleep once and sent him around introducing himself to a bunch of cattle as though they were people. And he had once sold Runkis a two-year-old runt for a young calf. A runt will have grown a long tail, but a calf will still have a calf-length tail.

"By hokey, that runt didn't have a long tail when I bought him from you yesterday," Runkis had said when he realized he was taken.

"He had the same tail," Lado told him. "You saw what I wanted you to see." This Lado was tricky, but nobody can send a man over the edge.

"I'll do it," Lado said this day after he'd thought about it a little. "I'll send Jessie Pidd there over the edge."

"Who?" Runkis asked.

"Jessie Pidd — drinking coffee there at the end of the counter."

"Oh. Oh, Jessie. All right. When will you do it?"

"I've started," said Lado. "I've thinned him out a bit already. You can amuse yourselves by watching him fade. It will be gradual, but in three days he will be gone completely."

Man! We laughed like a clatter of colts coming onto new clover! But it didn't bother Lado; he always had a deep smile when he was on the long end of a bargain, and he had it now.

In a way, Lado had a jump on the thing. Jessie Pidd wasn't all there to begin with, though in a different meaning of the words. He was a simple-minded slight man, not much to him. We used to say that he was so thin that he'd dissap-

pear if you looked at him sideways, but that was a joke.

Lado took a lot of harrowing and cross-harrowing as we sat around late that night. We played poker and pitch, and Lado won; we had out the dominoes and played draw and moon, and Lado won. We went with the dice a while, and Lado won. He was the winningest man who ever hit our town, but it looked like there was one deal coming up he couldn't win. But he kept taking bets on the thing; if he did make Jessie Pidd disappear, Lado would own half the town.

JESSIE PIDD looked bad the next morning when he sidled into Cattleman's Cafe for breakfast. He'd always looked bad though.

"Are you all right, Jessie?" Raymond Runkis asked him.

"Don't feel all there," Jessie said. Somehow that startled us.

"L a d o," Runkis warned. "Tricks are tricks, and you've pulled some good ones. But if you really harm the man it will go hard on you around here."

"Runkis, you don't even know what constitutes a man," said Lado.

"No, I don't. All I say is you'd better not hurt him."

"Nobody will be hurt by any trick of mine," Lado said.

But, whatever it was, it had begun.

At mid-morning. Johnny No-

ble cried out to the town that Jessie Pidd was walking in the sunlight and casting no shadow. Two others saw it. Then it clouded over and couldn't be tested further.

Just before noon, Maudie Malcome cornered Lado in the bank lobby. "Mr. Lado, what are you doing to my husband?" she demanded.

"Have you a husband, Maudie?" Lado asked.

"You red-headed scum! Jessie Pidd, my common-law husband."

"Why, Maudie, I am making him disappear."

"If you harm a hair of him, I'll kill you."

Later that day the stories were going around town like an epidemic. Even hard-headed Raymond Runkis had to admit that something was wrong.

"I tell you that I can see light shining through Jessie Pidd there," he declared, "and I can see the outlines of objects behind him. Tell me, Lado, before we come to violence — is this all a trick?"

"Yes, it is all a trick," said Lado.

"Well, I am hay-baleing going to keep this trick within bounds," Runkis said. "I have the biggest and tightest house in town. The eight of us here for witnesses, and you Jessie, and you Lado, are going there, and we are going to see this

thing through. If any of you have any business, attend to it within an hour. Then be at my house. We are going to keep the damnest watch anyone ever kept. Whatever you are, Lado, and whatever you do, we will watch you do it. Am I clear?"

"No. You are confused, Runkis, but your plan suits me. What trickster does not love a captive audience?"

WE LAID IN groceries, assembled in the house of Runkis, and locked it tight just at sundown that day. Nobody was allowed to enter for fifty hours, though people did knock and rattle — particularly Maudie Malcomb.

Ten of us: Mihai Lado, Jessie Pidd, Raymond Runkis, Johnny Noble, Will Wilton, Wenchie Hetmonek, Mike McGregor, Billy West, little Mack McGoot, Remberton Randall — one of this bunch (and the way things got legal and sticky later I'm sure not going to say which) being myself.

Runkis appointed us into watches. We dragged two beds into the big room, and set up two cots. Some of us slept, and some of us played pitch to pass away the night.

And about once an hour Runkis exploded: "Lado, you're killing a man! If he goes, you go too!"

"I swear that I do no harm to a person named Jessie Pidd

or to any other person," Lado always said.

None of us could longer doubt that Jessie had become faintly transparent. Outlines of objects could be seen through him; his own outline softened. There was less to him than there had been.

None of us slept much that night. It was a growing horror to watch Jessie go, and by morning you might say that he was half gone.

The next day was like a crooked dream. Lado had already won all the money in the house. Thereafter, we played for kitchen matches. The cards seemed to change spots and colors in my hands, and the others had the same trouble. Lado also won all the kitchen matches in the house. We watched Jessie fade before our eyes. We lost all sense of time and proportion.

That night Pidd had become so unsubstantial that smoke drifted through him; there wasn't much left of him but his outline and his slow-witted smile.

By second morning, Pidd was still there, but barely. It was running out in a living nightmare. By noon, little Mack McGoot announced that he could no longer see Jessie. By mid-afternoon, all of us would sometimes lose Jessie Pidd, and it was only with the great-

est difficulty that his outline could be picked up again.

Then we lost him.

First the outline forever — then the slow-witted smile. By dark, Jessie Pidd was gone. We sat silent and stunned. Then Raymond Runkis broke it with a rumbling sigh: "Lado!" Runkis growled dangerously, "can you still see him?"

"Never could," Lado said softly.

"What?"

"I said that I never could see him," Lado explained easily.

"You fool! This won't go! Jessie is gone, Lado!"

"I know it. It's the best trick I ever pulled."

Runkis collared Lado savagely. "Bring him back! Bring him back right now, Lado!"

"I can't, Runkis. There is nobody to bring back."

"There is — was — Jessie Pidd. Bring him back or I name it murder!"

"I believe we should all go to the sheriff," said Hetmonek. "If this isn't murder, we will find as good a name for it."

ALL OF US were witnesses at the hearing. We gave affidavits. Sheriff Bryce was there but out of his depth. There was also a police doctor named Bates from the City, and a Commissioner named Otteman from State. This Otteman was asking the questions, and he

had a cutting way of doing it.

"Mr. Lado," he said, "I have heard what is either the most brainless meandering ever given at a hearing, or the most damning testimony it has ever been my displeasure to savor. Are there facts behind this, Lado?"

"Facts of a sort," said Lado. "What do you want to know?"

"Younger brother of a blind moose! What happened to Jessie Pidd?"

"He disappeared. They've told you about it."

"Can you bring him back?"

"Oh, I suppose I could, for a little while, but it would spoil the joke."

"You consider the murder of a man a joke, Mr. Lado?"

"It isn't a question of murder at all; Jessie Pidd was not a person."

"Ah? What was he then?"

"He was nothing at all. There was never any Jessie Pidd."

"Lado, you are a red-headed liar," Runkis growled.

"Sure, I'm a liar," Lado admitted. "That's to say that I'm an illusionist. I have a hundred powers, and I played a little joke with one of them. I can make anything seem to be; I can create reality. I've hidden these things because I don't understand their purpose yet. And one day, to lighten the responsibility they cast over me, I decided to have a little fun."

"When was it you first

caused us to see Jessie?" Runkis asked tightly.

"The other night when you challenged me to send a man over the edge," Lado said.

"Then how have we known Jessie for years and him doing odd jobs around town?" Runkis asked.

"You hadn't known him, Raymond," Lado said. "I suggested him to you and you were susceptible. There was never any Jessie Pidd."

"Lado, there are difficulties about your explanation," said Otteman. "There is testimony that Pidd was indeed known here for years; he was the common-law husband of one — ah — Maudie Malcomb."

"The nearest thing to a husband that Maudie will ever have, it's true," said Lado. "She is an irrational woman."

"She's no such thing!" swore little Mack McGoot. "She is a poor, simple-minded person, as was Jessie. We liked them. There is going to be vengeance here, either inside or outside the lines."

"I didn't know I was that good," said Lado. "I turned it on. Why can't I turn it off? Otteman, these people dream in bunches and build up what never was. Test it! Find me written reference to Pidd antedating these last four days. If a man *did* live in a town for years, there would have to be some record of him, he would have

to live somewhere. If he did odd jobs for years, then someone would have records of payments to his name. We live in a paper world, and somewhere there would be paper on him."

"Jessie wasn't such as to be much noted," said John Noble.

"Try it, Otteman," insisted Lado. "You will find there is no note anywhere. I also ask that you get separate descriptions of him from these eight witnesses."

"We will recess and try it for two hours," said Otteman.

THEY ASSEMBLED a mass of information in two hours.

"The hearing will come to order again," Otteman announced. "You haven't a thing to stand on, Lado. There's no doubt of it: Jessie Pidd was well known around town for many years."

"How many years?" asked Lado.

"Nobody is quite sure. Estimates run from five to fifty years."

"Do the descriptions of this non-man agree?"

"All agree in calling him non-descript."

"And what age do they give this nondescript person?"

"All speak of him as of an uncertain age. Mr. Lado, I have appraised more evidence than you have. It is normal for people to be vague; it is the usual thing that they do not describe well. But I have no doubt that Jessie Pidd was a real man, and

that you have inflicted on him a real death."

"Did you find any written note of him? That's the test."

"No, we didn't; and it's no test at all. As they all say, he was not such a man as you would make written note of. Those who hired him paid him in cash. He had never registered to vote, never had a driver's license or social security number, never had a bank account, never been on the tax rolls. He was a man untouched by affairs; he was no part of your paper world."

"Did he himself leave anything in writing?"

"No. The opinion is that he was an illiterate."

"Well cat-haired conniptions! Didn't he even leave an X?"

"Not even an X, Lado, but he was real for all that. We may as well close off this diversion of yours and get back to the main inquiry. How did you kill him? Where is his body?"

"Mr. Otteman, I am speaking clear truth to a room that has no ears for it," said Lado. "Illusion is one of the gifts that came to me unasked. For the amusement of myself and, I believed, of others, I created an illusion of a man; then I let it fade. There was no Jessie Pidd. He was a simple man only in that I created him by a simple trick. These are all simple men here, Mr. Otteman, and they are subject to a continuing illusion."

"Have you no remorse for the murder?" asked Ottleman.

"Suffering sandburs, you cannot be as obdurate as that! It was a simple trick. Now it is over with, and nobody laughs." Then Lado spoke more shrilly. "I have the powers by accident. I'm a new kind of man."

"We have an old kind of justice," said Ottleman. "We will find the body wherever you have hidden it, and you will hang for it."

BUT, HOWEVER much the rope itched for Lado's neck, officialdom could not hang him without a body for evidence.

Fortunately the private persons of us were not so circumscribed. It had to be done, and we did it.

It was bright afternoon. Lado didn't want to go; a new kind of man makes just as much fuss about going as the old kind.

"You fools!" Lado shouted with his hands tied behind him. "We are the beginning of something. We're on the line to the future."

"But on the wrong end of the rope today," Runkis said.

"You fools," he screamed. "There was never any Jessie Piddl!"

Oh, well — we knew that by now. But, as Lado said once, who wants to spoil a good joke?

We hanged him then. Like he said, he arrived in the world a little too early for his own

good. He had stopped screaming just before we hoisted him. "I got the powers blind," he said. "I keep thinking somebody will tell me what to do with them."

"Bet they don't," said Raymond Runkis, and we strung him up then.

Runkis and little Mack McGoot disposed of the body. They said it would never be found where they put it, and it wasn't.

WHAT do you do when you have just hanged a man? Why, the man himself had showed us what to do. Besides, a future kind of man doesn't leave much of a hole in the present.

When a whole town sticks together it can do wonders in a few hours. We destroyed every trace of Mihai Lado. We had plenty in our favor. That man with his eternal roll of bills had done everything in cash. We suspected that the name he used wasn't his real name. We went over every business, every person, every deal, every record. A few things had to be smudged, but not many. We had sent him clear over the edge.

When Ottleman, accompanied by the militia, arrived at dusk, it was a remarkably hard-of-hearing town they had come to.

Hanged a man? Who? Us? A Mihai Lado? That name sure did not ring any bell in our town. Even our sheriff did not recognize Mr. Ottleman when he

came; they had to be introduced all over again. Otteman set his briefcase down on the ground in exasperation.

There is some mistake, we said. This is Springdale. You must be looking for Springfield clear in the other part of the State. A previous hearing, you say? And only the day before yesterday? There must be some mistake. And the papers in your briefcase there? I bet that is the case the boy just ran away with. No, we don't know who he was. We don't know who anyone is.

It was a nervous business, but we played it out all the way and we got clear with it. People, there never was any Jessie Pidd in our town, and there never was any Mihai Lado either.

There's one thing about those

future types, though; we all got to go through that future country.

"He'll be waiting up ahead," said little Mack McGoot, "one side or the other of the barrier. He'll have us then."

"Bet he don't," said Raymond Runkis, but Runkis had begun to go to pieces. He began to get old all at once, and old is one thing I don't want to get. I sure drag my feet on it.

Up ahead, around some dark corner, one side or the other of the barrier as little Mack McGoot says, there's a big ruddy freckled man who has some powers that will be beginning to get ripe. He's a man with crazy eyes that didn't grow around here, and he's like one man looking out through the face of another like a mask.



The Leaden Ring

by S. Baring-Gould

(author of *Jean Bouchon*)

Robert Silverberg tells me that S (abine) BARING-GOULD was a sort of 19th century Silverberg — like Bob, he wrote voluminously, producing all manner of fiction and non-fiction and his range of subject matter is quite astonishing. (It includes "Onward Christian Soldiers".) The present story comes from a collection entitled, *A Book Of Ghosts*, which was first printed in 1904. The stories therein had been published earlier in magazines — some of them anyway — one going back to 1853, when it appeared in *ONCE A WEEK*. There is no pedigree listed for this present tale of a somewhat improper Victorian maiden (let me not deceive you; her sins are not of the flesh); and while some of the tales have a pawky humor about them, there's nothing funny about Miss Julia's plight.

"IT IS NOT possible, Julia. I cannot conceive how the idea of attending the county ball can have entered your head after what has happened. Poor young Hattersley's dreadful death suffices to stop that."

"But, aunt, Mr. Hattersley is no relation of ours."

"No relation — but you know that the poor fellow would not have shot himself if it had not been for you."

"Oh, Aunt Elizabeth, how can you say so, when the verdict was that he committed suicide when in an unsound condition of mind? How could I help his blowing out his brains, when those brains were deranged?"

"Julia, do not talk like this. If he did go off his head, it was you who upset him by first drawing him on, leading him to believe that you liked him, and

then throwing him over so soon as the Hon. James Lawlor appeared on the *tapis*. Consider: what will people say if you go to the assembly?"

"What will they say if I do not go? They will immediately set it down to my caring deeply for James Hattersley, and they will think that there was some sort of engagement."

"They are not likely to suppose that. But really, Julia, you were for a while all smiles and encouragement. Tell me, now, did Mr. Hattersley propose to you?"

"Well — yes, he did, and I refused him."

"And then he went and shot himself in despair. Julia, you cannot with any face go to the ball."

"Nobody knows that he proposed. And precisely because I do go everyone will conclude that he did not propose. I do not wish it to be supposed that he did."

"His family, of course, must have been aware. They will see your name among those present at the assembly."

"Aunt, they are in too great trouble to look at the paper to see who were at the dance."

"His terrible death lies at your door. How you can have the heart, Julia . . ."

"I don't see it. Of course, I feel it. I am awfully sorry, and awfully sorry for his father, the admiral. I cannot set him up

again. I wish that when I rejected him he had gone and done as did Joe Pomeroy, marry one of his landlady's daughters."

"There, Julia, is another of your delinquencies. You lured on young Pomeroy till he proposed, then you refused him, and in a fit of vexation and mortified vanity he married a girl greatly beneath him in social position. If the *menage* prove a failure you will have it on your conscience that you have wrecked his life and perhaps hers as well."

"I cannot throw myself away as a charity to save this man or that from doing a foolish thing."

"What I complain of, Julia, is that you encouraged young Mr. Pomeroy till Mr. Hattersley appeared, whom you thought more eligible, and then you tossed him aside; and you did precisely the same with James Hattersley as soon as you came to know Mr. Lawlor. After all, Julia, I am not so sure that Mr. Pomeroy has not chosen the better part. The girl, I dare say, is simple, fresh, and affectionate."

"Your implication is not complimentary, Aunt Elizabeth."

"My dear, I have no patience with the young lady of the present day, who is shallow, self-willed, and indifferent to the feelings and happiness of others, who craves for excitement

and pleasure, and desires nothing that is useful and good. Where now will you see a girl like Viola's sister, who let concealment, like a worm i' the bud, feed on her damask cheek? Nowadays a girl lays herself at the feet of a man if she likes him, turns herself inside-out to let him and all the world read her heart."

"I have no relish to be like Viola's sister, and have my story — a blank. I never grovelled at the feet of Joe Pomeroy or James Hattersley."

"No, but you led each to consider himself the favored one till he proposed, and then you refused him. It was like smiling at a man and then stabbing him to the heart."

"Well — I don't want people to think that James Hattersley cared for me — I certainly never cared for him — nor that he proposed; so I shall go to the ball."

JULIA DEMANT was an orphan. She had been retained at school till she was eighteen, and then had been removed just as the age when a girl begins to take an interest in her studies, and not to regard them as drudgery. On her removal she had cast away all that she had acquired, and had been plunged into the whirl of Society. Then suddenly her father died — she had lost her mother some years before — and she went to live with her aunt, Miss

Flemming. Julia had inherited a sum of about five hundred pounds a year, and would probably come in for a good estate and funds as well on the death of her aunt. She had been flattered as a girl at home, and at school as a beauty, and she certainly thought no small bones of herself.

Miss Flemming was an elderly lady with a sharp tongue, very outspoken, and very decided in her opinions; but her action was weak, and Julia soon discovered that she could bend the aunt to do anything she willed, though she could not modify or alter her opinions.

In the matter of Joe Pomeroy and James Hattersley, it was as Miss Flemming had said. Julia had encouraged Mr. Pomeroy, and had only cast him off because she thought better of the suit of Mr. Hattersley, son of an admiral of that name. She had seen a good deal of young Hattersley, had given him every encouragement, had so entangled him, that he was madly in love with her; and then, when she came to know the Hon. James Lawlor, and saw that he was fascinated, she rejected Hattersley with the consequences alluded to in the conversation above given.

Julia was particularly anxious to be present at the county ball, for she had been already booked by Mr. Lawlor for several dances, and she was quite re-

solved to make an attempt to bring him to a declaration.

On the evening of the ball Miss Flemming and Julia entered the carriage. The aunt had given way, as was her wont, but under protest.

For about ten minutes neither spoke, and then Miss Flemming said, "Well, you know my feelings about this dance. I do not approve. I distinctly disapprove. I do not consider your going to the ball in good taste, or, as you would put it, in good form. Poor young Hattersley . . ."

"Oh, dear aunt, do let us put young Hattersley aside. He was buried with the regular forms, I suppose?"

"Yes, Julia."

"Then the rector accepted the verdict of the jury at the inquest. Why should not we? A man who is unsound in his mind is not responsible for his actions."

"I suppose not."

"Much less, then, I who live ten miles away."

"I do not say that you are responsible for his death, but for the condition of mind that led him to do the dreadful deed. Really, Julia, you are one of those into whose head or heart only by a surgical operation could the thought be introduced that you could be in the wrong. A hypodermic syringe would be too weak an instrument to effect such a radical change in you. Everyone else may be in the

wrong, you — never. As for me, I cannot get young Hattersley out of my head."

"And I," retorted Julia with asperity, for her aunt's words had stung her — "I, for my part, do not give him a thought."

She had hardly spoken the words before a chill wind began to pass round her. She drew the Barege shawl that was over her bare shoulders closer about her, and said, "Auntie! is the glass down on your side?"

"No, Julia; why do you ask?"

"There is such a draught."

"Draught! — I do not feel one; perhaps the window on your side hitches."

"Indeed, that is all right. It is blowing harder and is deadly cold. Can one of the front panes be broken?"

"No. Rogers would have told me had that been the case. Besides, I can see that they are sound."

THE WIND of which Julia complained swirled and whistled about her. It increased in force; it plucked at her shawl and slewed it about her throat; it tore at the lace on her dress. It snatched at her hair, it wrenched it away from the pins, the combs that held it in place; one long tress was lashed across the face of Miss Flemming. Then the hair, completely released, eddied up above the girl's head, and next moment was carried as a drift before her, blinding her.

Then — a sudden explosion, as though a gun had been fired into her ear; and with a scream of terror she sank back among the cushions. Miss Flemming, in great alarm, pulled the check-string, and the carriage stopped. The footman descended from the box and came to the side. The old lady drew down the window and said: "Oh! Phillips, bring the lamp. Something has happened to Miss Demant."

The man obeyed, and sent a flood of light into the carriage. Julia was lying back, white and senseless. Her hair was scattered over her face, neck, and shoulders; the flowers that had been stuck in it, the pins that had fastened it in place, the pads that had given shape to the convolutions lay strewn, some on her lap, some in the rug at the bottom of the carriage.

"Phillips!" ordered the old lady in great agitation, "tell Rogers to turn the horses and drive home at once; and do you run as fast as you can for Dr. Crate."

A few minutes after the carriage was again in motion, Julia revived. Her aunt was chafing her hand.

"Oh, aunt!" she said, "are all the glasses broken?"

"Broken — what glasses?"

"Those of the carriage — with the explosion."

"Explosion, my dear!"

"Yes. That gun which was discharged. It stunned me. Were you hurt?"

"I heard no gun — no explosion."

"But I did. It was as though a bullet had been discharged into my brain. I wonder that I escaped. Who can have fired at us?"

"My dear, no one fired. I heard nothing. I know what it was. I had the same experience many years ago. I slept in a damp bed, and awoke stone deaf in my right ear. I remained so for three weeks. But one night when I was at a ball and was dancing, all at once I heard a report as of a pistol in my right ear, and immediately heard quite clearly again. It was wax."

"But, Aunt Elizabeth, I have not been deaf."

"You have not noticed that you were deaf."

"Oh! but look at my hair; it was that wind that blew it about."

"You are laboring under a delusion, Julia. There was no wind."

"But look — feel how my hair is down."

"That has been done by the motion of the carriage. There are many ruts in the road."

They reached home, and Julia, feeling sick, frightened, and bewildered, retired to bed. Dr. Crate arrived, said that she was hysterical, and ordered something to soothe her nerves. Julia was not convinced. The explanation offered by Miss Flemming did not satisfy her. That

she was a victim to hysteria she did not in the least believe. Neither her aunt, nor the coachman, nor Phillips had heard the discharge of a gun. As to the rushing wind, Julia was satisfied that she had experienced it. The lace was ripped, as by a hand, from her dress, and the shawl was twisted about her throat; besides, her hair had not been so slightly arranged that the jolting of the carriage would completely disarrange it. She was vastly perplexed over what she had undergone. She thought and thought, but could get no nearer to a solution of the mystery.

NEXT DAY, as she was almost herself again, she rose and went about as usual.

In the afternoon the Hon. James Lawlor called and asked after Miss Flemming. The butler replied that his mistress was out making calls, but that Miss Demant was at home, and he believed was on the terrace. Mr. Lawlor at once asked to see her.

He did not find Julia in the parlor or on the terrace, but in a lower garden to which she had descended to feed the goldfish in the pond.

"Oh! Miss Demant," said he, "I was so disappointed not to see you at the ball last night."

"I was very unwell; I had a fainting fit and could not go."

"It threw a damp on our spirits — that is to say, on mine.

I had you booked for several dances."

"You were able to give them to others."

"But that was not the same to me. I did an act of charity and self-denial. I danced instead with the ugly Miss Burgons and with Miss Pounding, and that was like dragging about a sack of potatoes. I believe it ning, but for that shocking affair of young Hattersley which kept some of the better sort would have been a jolly eve-away. I mean those who know the Hattersleys. Of course, for me that did not matter, we were not acquainted. I never even spoke with the fellow. You knew him, I believe? I heard some people say so, and that you had not come because of him. The supper, for a subscription ball, was not atrociously bad."

"What did they say of me?"

"Oh! — if you will know — that you did not attend the ball because you liked him very much, and were awfully cut up."

"I — I! What a shame that people should talk! I never cared a rush for him. He was nice enough in his way, not a bounder, but tolerable as young men go."

Mr. Lawlor laughed. "I should not relish to have such a qualified estimate made of me."

"Nor need you. You are interesting. He became so only when he had shot himself. It will be

by this alone that he will be remembered."

"But there is no smoke without fire. Did he like you—much?"

"Dear Mr. Lawlor, I am not a clairvoyante, and never was able to see into the brains or hearts of people — least of all of young men. Perhaps it is fortunate for me that I cannot."

"One lady told me that he had proposed to you."

"Who was that? The potato-sack?"

"I will not give her name. Is there any truth in it? Did he?"

"No."

At the moment she spoke there sounded in her ear a whistle of wind, and she felt a current like a cord of ice creep round her throat, increasing in force and compression, her hat was blown off, and next instant a detonation rang through her head as though a gun had been fired into her ear. She uttered a cry and sank upon the ground.

James Lawlor was bewildered. His first impulse was to run to the house for assistance; then he considered that he could not leave her lying on the wet soil, and he stooped to raise her in his arms and to carry her within. In novels young men perform such a feat without difficulty; but in fact they are not able to do it, especially when the girl is tall and big-boned. Moreover, one in a faint is a dead weight. Lawlor staggered under his burden to the steps.

It was as much as he could perform to carry her up to the terrace, and there he placed her on a seat. Panting, and with his muscles quivering after the strain, he hastened to the drawing-room, rang the bell, and when the butler appeared, he gasped: "Miss Demant has fainted; you and I and the footman must carry her within."

"She fainted last night in the carriage," said the butler.

WHEN JULIA came to her senses, she was in bed attended by the housekeeper and her maid. A few moments later Miss Flemming arrived.

"Oh, aunt! I have heard it again."

"Heard what, dear?"

"The discharge of a gun."

"It is nothing but wax," said the old lady. "I will drop a little sweet-oil into your ear, and then have it syringed with warm water."

"I want to tell you something — in private."

Miss Flemming signed to the servants to withdraw.

"Aunt," said the girl, "I must say something. This is the second time that this has happened. I am sure it is significant. James Lawlor was with me in the sunken garden, and he began to speak about James Hattersley. You know it was when we were talking about him last night that I heard that awful noise. It was precisely as if a gun had been



discharged into my ear. I felt as if all the nerves and tissues of my head were being torn, and all the bones of my skull shattered — just what Mr. Hattersley must have undergone when he pulled the trigger. It was an agony for a moment perhaps, but it felt as if it lasted an hour. Mr. Lawlor had asked me point blank if James Hattersley had proposed to me, and I said, 'No.' I was perfectly justified in so answering, because he had no right to ask me such a question. It was an impertinence on his part, and I answered him shortly and sharply with a negative.

"But actually James Hattersley proposed twice to me. He would not accept a first refusal, but came next day bothering me again, and I was pretty curt with him. He made some remarks that were rude about how I had treated him, and which I will not repeat, and as he left, in a state of great agitation, he said, 'Julia, I vow that you shall not forget this, and you shall belong to no one but me, alive or dead.' I considered this great nonsense, and did not accord it another thought. But, really, these terrible annoyances, this wind and the bursts of noise, do seem to me to come from him. It is just as though he felt a malignant delight in distressing me, now that he is dead. I should like to defy him, and I will do it if I can, but I cannot

bear more of these experiences — they will kill me."

Several days elapsed.

Mr. Lawlor called repeatedly to inquire, but a week passed before Julia was sufficiently recovered to receive him, and then the visit was one of courtesy and of sympathy, and the conversation turned upon her health, and on indifferent themes.

But some few days later it was otherwise. She was in the conservatory alone, pretty much herself again, when Mr. Lawlor was announced.

Physically she had recovered, or believed that she had, but her nerves had actually received a severe shock. She had made up her mind that the phenomena of the circling wind and the explosion were in some mysterious manner connected with Hattersley.

She bitterly resented this, but she was in mortal terror of a recurrence; and she felt no compunction for her treatment of the unfortunate young man, but rather a sense of deep resentment against him. If he were dead, why did he not lie quiet and cease from vexing her?

To be a martyr was to her no gratification, for hers was not a martyrdom that provoked sympathy, and which could make her interesting.

She had hitherto supposed that when a man died there was an end of him; his condition was

determined for good or for ill. But that a disembodied spirit should hover about and make itself a nuisance to the living, had never entered into her calculations.

"Julia - if I may be allowed so to call you" - began Mr. Lawlor, "I have brought you a bouquet of flowers. Will you accept them?"

"Oh!" she said, as he handed the bunch to her, "how kind of you. At this time of the year they are so rare, and aunt's gardener is so miserly that he will spare me none for my room but some miserable bits of geranium. It is too bad of you wasting your money like this upon me."

"It is no waste, if it afford you pleasure."

"It is a pleasure. I dearly love flowers."

"To give you pleasure," said Mr. Lawlor, "is the great object of my life. If I could assure you happiness - if you would allow me to hope - to seize this opportunity, now that we are alone together . . ."

He drew near and caught her hand. His features were agitated, his lips trembled, there was earnestness in his eyes.

At once a cold blast touched Julia and began to circle about her and to flutter her hair. She trembled and drew back. That paralysing experience was about to be renewed. She turned dead-white, and put her hand to her right ear. "Oh, James!

James!" she gasped. "Do not, pray do not speak what you want to say, or I shall faint. It is coming on. I am not yet well enough to hear it. Write to me and I will answer. For pity's sake do not speak it." Then she sank upon a seat - and at that moment her aunt entered the conservatory.

ON THE following day a note was put into her hand, containing a formal proposal from the Hon. James Lawlor; and by return of post Julia answered with an acceptance.

There was no reason whatever why the engagement should be long; and the only alternative mooted was whether the wedding should take place before Lent or after Easter. Finally, it was settled that it should be celebrated on Shrove Tuesday. This left a short time for the necessary preparations. Miss Flemming would have to go to town with her niece concerning a trousseau, and a trousseau is not turned out rapidly any more than an armed cruiser.

There is usually a certain period allowed to young people who have become engaged, to see much of each other, to get better acquainted with one another, to build their castles in the air, and to indulge in little passages of affection, vulgarly called "spooning". But in this case the spooning had to be curtailed and postponed.

At the outset, when alone with James, Julia was nervous. She feared a recurrence of those phenomena that so affected her. But, although every now and then the wind curled and soughed about her, it was not violent, nor was it chilling; and she came to regard it as a wail of discomfiture. Moreover, there was no recurrence of the detonation, and she fondly hoped that with her marriage the vexation would completely cease.

In her heart was deep down a sense of exultation. She was defying James Hattersley and setting his prediction at naught. She was not in love with Mr. Lawlor; she liked him, in her cold manner, and was not insensible to the social advantage that would be hers when she became the Honourable Mrs. Lawlor.

The day of the wedding arrived. Happily it was fine. "Blessed is the bride the sun shines on," said the cheery Miss Flemming; "an omen, I trust, of a bright and unruffled life in your new condition."

All the neighborhood was present at the church. Miss Flemming had many friends. Mr. Lawlor had fewer present, as he belonged to a distant county. The church path had been laid with red cloth, the church decorated with flowers, and a choir was present to twitter "The voice that breathed o'er Eden."

The rector stood by the altar, and two cushions had been laid at the chancel step. The rector was to be assisted by an uncle of the bridegroom who was in Holy Orders; the rector, being old-fashioned, had drawn on pale grey kid gloves.

First arrived the bridegroom with his best man, and stood in a nervous condition balancing himself first on one foot, then on the other, waiting, observed by all eyes.

Next entered the procession of the bride, attended by her maids, to the "Wedding March" in *Lohengrin*, on a wheezy organ. Then Julia and her intended took their places at the chancel step for the performance of the first portion of the ceremony, and the two clergy descended to them from the altar.

"Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife?"

"I will."

"Wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband?"

"I will."

"I, James, take thee, Julia, to my wedded wife, to have and to hold . . ." and so on.

As the words were being spoken, a cold rush of air passed over the clasped hands, numbing them, and began to creep round the bride, and to flutter her veil. She set her lips and knitted her brows. In a few minutes she would be beyond the reach of these manifestations.

When it came to her turn to

she began firmly: "I, Julia, take thee, James . . ." but as she proceeded the wind became fierce; it raged about her, it caught her veil on one side and buffeted her cheek, it switched the veil about her throat, as though strangling her with a drift of snow contracting into ice. But she persevered to the end.

Then James Lawlor produced the ring, and was about to place it on her finger with the prescribed words: "With this ring I thee wed . . ." when a report rang in her ear, followed by a heaving of her skull, as though the bones were being burst asunder, and she sank unconscious on the chancel step.

IN THE midst of profound commotion, she was raised and conveyed to the vestry, followed by James Lawlor, trembling and pale. He had slipped the ring back into his waistcoat pocket. Dr. Crate, who was present, hastened to offer his professional assistance.

In the vestry Julia rested in a Glastonbury chair, white and still, with her hands resting in her lap. And to the amazement of those present, it was seen that on the third finger of her left hand was a leaden ring, rude and solid as though fashioned out of a bullet. Restoratives were applied, but full a quarter of an hour elapsed before Julia opened her eyes, and a little

colour returned to her lips and cheek. But, as she raised her hands to her brow to wipe away the damps that had formed on it, her eye caught sight of the leaden ring, and with a cry of horror she sank again into insensibility.

The congregation slowly left the church, awestruck, whispering, asking questions, receiving no satisfactory answers, forming surmises all incorrect.

"I am very much afraid, Mr. Lawlor," said the rector, "that it will be impossible to proceed with the service today; it must be postponed till Miss Demant is in a condition to conclude her part, and to sign the register. I do not see how it can be gone on with today. She is quite unequal to the effort."

The carriage which was to have conveyed the couple to Miss Flemming's house, and then, later, to have taken them to the station for their honeymoon, the horses decorated with white rosettes, the whip adorned with a white bow, had now to convey Julia, hardly conscious, supported by her aunt, to her home.

No rice could be thrown. The bell-ringers, prepared to give a joyous peal, were constrained to depart.

The reception at Miss Flemming's was postponed. No one thought of attending. The cakes, the ices, were consumed in the kitchen.

The bridegroom, bewildered, almost frantic, ran hither and thither, not knowing what to do, what to say.

Julia lay as a stone for fully two hours; and when she came to herself could not speak. When conscious, she raised her left hand, looked on the leaden ring, and sank back again into senselessness.

Not till late in the evening was she sufficiently recovered to speak, and then she begged her aunt, who had remained by her bed without stirring, to dismiss attendants. She desired to speak with her alone. When no one was in the room with her, save Miss Flemming, she said in a whisper: "Oh, Aunt Elizabeth! Oh, auntiel such an awful thing has happened. I can never marry Mr. Lawlor, never. I have married James Hattersley; I am a dead man's wife. At the time that James Lawlor was making the responses, I heard a piping voice in my ear, an unearthly voice, saying the same words. When I said: 'I, Julia, take you, James, to my wedded husband' — you know Mr. Hattersley is James as well as Mr. Lawlor — then the words applied to him as much or as well as to the other. And then, when it came to the giving of the ring, there was the explosion in my ear, as before — and the leaden ring was forced on to my finger,

and not James Lawlor's golden ring. It is of no use my resisting any more. I am a dead man's wife, and I cannot marry James Lawlor."

SOME YEARS have elapsed since that disastrous day and that incomplete marriage.

Miss Demant is Miss Demant still, and she has never been able to remove the leaden ring from the third finger of her left hand. Whenever the attempt has been made, either to disengage it by drawing it off or by cutting through it, there has ensued that terrifying discharge as of a gun into her ear, causing insensibility. The prostration that has followed, the terror it has inspired, have so affected her nerves, that she has desisted from every attempt to rid herself of the ring.

She invariably wears a glove on her left hand, and it is bulged over the third finger, where lies the leaden ring.

She is not a happy woman, although her aunt is dead and has left her a handsome estate. She has not got many acquaintances. She has no friends; for her temper is unamiable, and her tongue is bitter. She supposes that the world, as far as she knows it, is in league against her.

Towards the memory of James Hattersley she entertains a deadly hate. If an incanta-

tion could lay his spirit, if prayer could give him repose, she would have recourse to none of these expedients, even though they might relieve her,

so bitter is her resentment. And she harbors a silent wrath against Providence for allowing the dead to walk and to molest the living.

The Reckoning

Every now and then it's desirable to explain the method by which we score your ballots and comments, for the sake of new readers who would appreciate knowing just what happens if they take the trouble to fill out a preference coupon or write a letter or postcard.

There is no perfect scoring system, partly because every reader who comments on the stories does not rate each one in the issue, and even more because the voting readers constitute a rather small percentage of those who have purchased an issue. Over the course of years, we have tried many scoring systems — from back in the early 40's, when we first began to do this sort of thing — and finally arrived at the present one, which has been used for MOH from the beginning.

We ask you to rate stories in order of preference, 1, 2, 3, etc., and tell you that you may "tie" as often as you like. We also have two other symbols to indicate special cases: if you think a particular story is really outstanding, better than just "first place" (after all, "first place" in an issue which you did not think was good has little meaning), we ask you to place an "O" before the story and *then* start the "1, 2, 3, etc." listing. If you thought a story was *bad*, not merely didn't care for it, or considered it well done even if you disliked it (after all, in what you thought a top-rate issue, last place might still be quite good), then we ask you to place an "X" before that title.

In our Spring issue (#15) there were six stories. O votes were scored "O"; X votes were scored "7" — a penalty point. A running score was kept so that we could see at a glance, every moment just how the stories stood.

(Turn to Page 117)

The Monster Of The Prophecy

by Clark Ashton Smith

(author of *The Door To Saturn*),

A DISMAL fog-dank afternoon was turning into a murky twilight when Theophilus Alvor paused on Brooklyn Bridge to peer down at the dim river with a shudder of sinister surmise. He was wondering how it would feel to cast himself into the chill, turbid waters, and whether he could summon up the necessary courage for an act which, he had persuaded himself, was now becoming inevitable as well as laudable.

He felt that he was too weary, sick and disheartened to go on with the evil dream of existence.

From any human standpoint, there was doubtless abundant reason for Alvor's depression. Young, and full of unquenched visions and desires, he had come to Brooklyn from an upstate village three months before this autumn of 1930, hoping to find a publisher for his writings; but his old-fashioned

From *Out Of Space And Time*, Arkham House, 1942; copyright 1942 by Clark Ashton Smith; by permission of Arkham House.

Summer vacations in the 30s, when I was attending high school, usually included several weeks with relatives in Newport, Rhode Island, where I was living when AMAZING STORIES first appeared. (Poor people live in Newport, too.) It was nice to be back, but I couldn't take my science fiction collection with me. There came the day when, haunting the newsstands, I noticed a copy of the new issue of WEIRD TALES (October 1931) and picked it up. Among the contents was a short-short story by CLARK ASHTON SMITH, whose tales I'd been reading in WONDER STORIES and WONDER STORIES QUARTERLY. (It wasn't Smith who hooked me on that issue, or even Otis Adelbert Kline, but Edmond Hamilton with *The Shot From Saturn*.) There followed struggle with conscience: was it meet and proper for a science fiction fan to enjoy ghost stories, supernatural stuff, etc.? I skipped the next issue, but the December 1931 number offered another Hamilton interplanetary tale, plus a lead-off story by Robert E. Howard, who had had the lead-off in that October issue. Then in the actual month of December, on a cold day, I saw C. C. Senf's colorful cover for *The Monster of the Prophecy*. That did it; I was hooked. For a couple of months in 1932 I tried to squirm off the hook, and actually did miss two issues, but it was another Smith story, *The Testament of Athammaus*, (October 1932, and Hamilton was there, too.) that helped induce me to fling myself back upon the hook, and, of course, go after those missed issues. And I never voluntarily missed another issue for the rest of the Farnsworth Wright period. The present Smith story contains a good measure of the subtle irony that is to be found in many of his tales. I appreciated it at the time I first read it — although, then, Stanton A. Coblenz seemed to be the master of satire; today, I find the subtle type far more effective.

classic verses, in spite (or because) of their high imaginative fire, had been unanimously rejected both by magazines and book firms. Though Alvor had lived frugally and had chosen lodgings so humble as almost to constitute the proverbial poetic garret, the small sum of his savings was now exhausted. He was not only quite penniless, but his clothes were so worn as to be no longer presentable in editorial offices, and the soles of his shoes were becoming rapidly non-existent

from the tramping he had done. He had not eaten for days, and his last meal, like the several preceding ones, had been at the expense of his soft-hearted Irish landlady.

For more reasons than one, Alvor would have preferred another death than that of drowning. The foul and icy waters were not inviting from an esthetic viewpoint; and in spite of all he had heard to the contrary, he did not believe that such a death could be anything but painful and disagree-

able. By choice he would have selected a sovereign Oriental opiate, whose insidious slumber would have led through a realm of gorgeous dreams to the gentle night of an ultimate oblivion; or, failing this, a deadly poison of merciful swiftness. But such Lethean media are not readily obtainable by a man with an empty purse.

Damning his own lack of forethought in not reserving enough money for such an eventuation, Alvor shuddered on the twilight bridge, and looked at the dismal waters, and then at the no less dismal fog through which the troubled lights of the city had begun to break. And then, through the instinctive habit of a country-bred person who is also imaginative and beauty-seeking, he looked at the heavens above the city to see if any stars were visible. He thought of his recent *Ode to Antares*, which, unlike his earlier productions, was written in *vers libre* and had a strong modernistic irony mingled with its planturous lyricism. It had, however, proved as unsalable as the rest of his poems. Now, with a sense of irony far more bitter than that which he had put into his ode, he looked for the ruddy spark of Antares itself, but was unable to find it in the sodden sky. His gaze and his thoughts returned to the river.

"There is no need for that,

my young friend," said a voice at his elbow. Alvor was startled not only by the words, and by the clairvoyance they betrayed, but also by something that was unanalyzably strange in the tones of the voice that uttered them. The tones were both refined and authoritative; but in them there was a quality which, for lack of more precise words or imagery, he could think of only as metallic and inhuman. While his mind wrestled with swift-born unseizable fantasies, he turned to look at the stranger who had accosted him.

The man was neither uncommonly nor disproportionately tall; and he was modishly dressed, with a long overcoat and top hat. His features were not unusual, from what could be seen of them in the dusk, except for his full-lidded and burning eyes, like those of some nyctalopic animal. But from him there emanated a palpable sense of things that were inconceivably strange and terrifying and remote — a sense that was more patent, more insistent than any impression of mere form and odor and sound could have been, and which was well-nigh tactual in its intensity.

"I repeat," continued the man, "that there is no necessity for you to drown yourself in that river. A vastly different fate can be yours, if you choose . . . In the meanwhile, I shall

be honored and delighted if you will accompany me to my house, which is not far away."

IN A DAZE of astonishment preclusive of all analytical thought, or even of my clear cognizance of where he was going or what was happening, Alvor followed the stranger for several blocks in the swirling fog. Hardly knowing how he had come there, he found himself in the library of an old house which must in its time have had considerable pretensions to aristocratic dignity, for the paneling, carpet and furniture were all antique and were both rare and luxurious.

The poet was left alone for a few minutes in the library. Then his host reappeared and led him to a dining-room where an excellent meal for two had been brought in from a neighboring restaurant. Alvor, who was faint with inanition, ate with no attempt to conceal his ravening appetite, but noticed that the stranger made scarcely even a pretense of touching his own food. With a manner preoccupied and distraught, the man sat opposite Alvor, giving no more ostensible heed to his guest than the ordinary courtesies of a host required.

"We will talk now," said the stranger, when Alvor had finished. The poet, whose energies and mental faculties had been revived by the food, became

bold enough to survey his host with a frank attempt at appraisal. He saw a man of indefinite age, whose lineaments and complexion were Caucasian, but whose nationality he was unable to determine. The eyes had lost something of their weird luminosity beneath the electric light, but nevertheless they were most remarkable, and from them there poured a sense of unearthly knowledge and power and strangeness not to be formulated by human thought or conveyed in human speech. Under his scrutiny, vague, dazzling, intricate unshapable images rose on the dim borders of the poet's mind and fell back into oblivion ere he could confront them. Apparently without rime or reason, some lines of his *Ode to Antares* returned to him, and he found that he was repeating them over and over beneath his breath:

"Star of strange hope,
Phatos beyond our desperate
mire,
Lord of unscalable gulfs,
Lamp of unknowable life."

The hopeless, half-satiric yearning for another sphere which he had expressed in this poem, haunted his thoughts with a weird insistence.

"Of course, you have no idea who or what I am," said the stranger, "though your poetic intuitions are groping darkly toward the secret of my identi-

ty. On my part, there is no need for me to ask you anything, since I have already learned all that there is to learn about your life, your personality, and the dismal predicament from which I am now able to offer you a means of escape. Your name is Theophilus Alvor, and you are a poet whose classic style and romantic genius are not likely to win adequate recognition in this age and land. With an inspiration more prophetic than you dream, you have written, among other masterpieces, a quite admirable *Ode to Antares*."

"How do you know all this?" cried Alvor.

"To those who have the sensory apparatus with which to perceive them, thoughts are no less audible than spoken words. I can hear your thoughts, so you will readily understand that there is nothing surprising in my possession of more or less knowledge concerning you."

"But who are you?" exclaimed Alvor. "I have heard of people who could read the minds of others; but I did not believe that there was any human being who actually possessed such powers."

"I AM NOT a human being," rejoined the stranger, "even though I have found it convenient to don the semblance of one for a while, just as you or another of your race might wear

a masquerade costume. Permit me to introduce myself: my name, as nearly as can be conveyed in the phonetics of your world, is Vizaphmal, and I have come from a planet of the far-off mighty sun that is known to you as Antares. In my own world, I am a scientist, though the more ignorant classes look upon me as a wizard. In the course of profound experiments and researches, I have invented a device which enables me at will to visit other planets, no matter how remote in space. I have sojourned for varying intervals in more than one solar system; and I have found your world and its inhabitants so quaint and curious and monstrous that I have lingered here a little longer than I intended, because of my taste for the bizarre — a taste which is ineradicable, though no doubt reprehensible. It is now time for me to return: urgent duties call me, and I can not tarry. But there are reasons why I should like to take with me to my world a member of your race; and when I saw you on the bridge tonight, it occurred to me that you might be willing to undertake such an adventure. You are, I believe, utterly weary of the sphere in which you find yourself, since a little while ago you were ready to depart from it into the unknown dimension that you call death. I can offer you some-

thing much more agreeable and diversified than death, with a scope of sensation, a potentiality of experience beyond anything of which you have had even the faintest intimation in the poetic reveries looked upon as extravagant by your fellows."

Again and again, while listening to this long and singular address, Alvor seemed to catch in the tones of the voice that uttered it a supervening resonance, a vibration of overtones beyond the compass of a mortal throat. Though perfectly clear and correct in all details of enunciation, there was a hint of vowels and consonants not to be found in any terrestrial alphabet. However, the logical part of his mind refused to accept entirely these intimations of the supermundane; and he was now seized by the idea that the man before him was some new type of lunatic.

"Your thought is natural enough, considering the limitations of your experience," observed the stranger calmly. "However, I can easily convince you of its error by revealing myself to you in my true shape."

HE MADE THE gesture of one who throws off a garment. Alvor was blinded by an insufferable blaze of light, whose white glare, emanating in huge

beams from an orb-like center, filled the entire room and seemed to pass illimitably beyond through dissolving walls. When his eyes became accustomed to the light, he saw before him a being who had no conceivable likeness to his host. This being was more than seven feet in height, and had no less than five intricately jointed arms and three legs that were equally elaborate. His head, on a long, swan-like neck, was equipped not only with visual, auditory, nasal and oral organs of unfamiliar types, but had several appendages whose use was not readily to be determined. His three eyes, obliquely set and with oval pupils, rayed forth a green phosphorescence; the mouth, or what appeared to be such, was very small and had the lines of a downward-curving crescent; the nose was rudimentary, though with finely wrought nostrils; in lieu of eyebrows, he had a triple series of semicircular markings on his forehead, each of a different hue; and above his intellectually shapen head, above the tiny drooping ears with their complex lobes, there towered a gorgeous comb of crimson, not dissimilar in form to the crest on the helmet of a Grecian warrior. The head, the limbs and the whole body were mottled with interchanging lunes and moons of opalescent colors, never the same for

a moment in their unrelenting flux and reflux.

Alvor had the sensation of standing on the rim of prodigious gulfs, on a new Earth beneath new heavens; and the vistas of illimitable horizons, fraught with the multitudinous terror and manifold beauty of an imagery no human eye had ever seen hovered and wavered and flashed upon him with the same unstable fluorescence as the lunar variegations of the body at which he stared with such stupefaction. Then, in a little while, the strange light seemed to withdraw upon itself, retracting all its beams to a common center, and faded in a whirl of darkness. When this darkness had cleared away, he saw once more the form of his host, in conventional garb, with a slight ironic smile about his lips.

"Do you believe me now?" Vizaphmal queried.

"Yes, I believe you."

"Are you willing to accept my offer?"

"I accept it." A thousand questions were forming in Alvor's mind, but he dared not ask them. Divining these questions, the stranger spoke as follows:

"You wonder how it is possible for me to assume a human shape. I assure you, it is merely a matter of taking thought. My mental images are infinitely clearer and stronger than those

of any Earth-being, and by conceiving myself as a man, I can appear to you and your fellows as such.

"You wonder also as to the modus operandi of my arrival on Earth. This I shall now show and explain to you, if you will follow me."

HE LED the way to an upper story of the old mansion. Here, in a sort of attic, beneath a large skylight in the southward-sloping roof, there stood a curious mechanism, wrought of a darker metal which Alvor could not identify. It was a tall, complicated framework with many transverse bars and two stout upright rods terminating at each end in a single heavy disk. These disks seemed to form the main portions of the top and bottom.

"Put your hand between the bars," commanded Alvor's host.

Alvor tried to obey this command, but his fingers met with an adamant obstruction, and he realized that the intervals of the bars were filled with an unknown material clearer than glass or crystal.

"You behold here," said Vizaphmal, "an invention which, I flatter myself, is quite unique anywhere this side of the galactic suns. The disks at top and bottom are a vibratory device with a twofold use; and no other material than that of which they are wrought would

have the same properties, the same achievable rate of vibration. When you and I have locked ourselves within the framework, as we shall do anon, a few revolutions of the lower disk will have the effect of isolating us from our present environment, and we shall find ourselves in the midst of what is known to you as space, or ether. The vibrations of the upper disk, which we shall then employ are of such potency as to annihilate space itself in any direction desired. Space, like everything else in the atomic universe, is subject to laws of integration and dissolution. It was merely a matter of finding the vibrational power that would effect this dissolution; and, by untiring research, by ceaseless experimentation, I located and isolated the rare metallic elements which, in a state of union, are capable of this power."

While the poet was pondering all he had seen and heard, Vizaphmal touched a tiny knob, and one side of the framework swung open. He then turned off the electric light in the garret, and simultaneously with its extinction, a ruddy glow was visible in the interior of the machine, serving to illumine all the parts, but leaving the room around it in darkness. Standing beside his invention, Vizaphmal looked at the skylight, and Alvor followed

his gaze. The fog cleared away and many stars were out, including the red gleam of Antares, now high in the south. The stranger was evidently making certain preliminary calculations, for he moved the machine a little after peering at the star, and adjusted a number of fine wires in the interior, as if he were tuning some stringed instrument.

At last he turned to Alvor.

"Everything is now in readiness," he announced. "If you are still prepared to accompany me, we will take our departure."

Alvor was conscious of an unexpected coolness and fortitude as he answered: "I am at your service." The unparalleled occurrences and disclosures of the evening, the well-nigh undreamable imminence of a plunge across untold immensity, such as no man had been privileged to dare before, had really benumbed his imagination, and he was unable at the moment to conceive the true awesomeness of what he had undertaken.

VIZAPHMAL indicated the place where Alvor was to stand in the machine. The poet entered, and assumed a position between one of the upright rods and the side, opposite Vizaphmal. He found that a layer of the transparent material was interposed between his feet and the large disk in which

the rods were based. No sooner had he stationed himself, than, with a celerity and an utter silence that were uncanny, the framework closed upon itself with hermetic tightness, till the jointure where it had opened was no longer detectable.

"We are now in a sealed compartment," explained the Antaran, "into which nothing can penetrate. Both the dark metal and the crystalline are substances that refuse the passage of heat and cold, of air and ether, or of any known cosmic ray, with the one exception of light itself, which is admitted by the clear metal."

When he ceased, Alvor realized that they were walled about with an insulating silence utter and absolute as that of some intersidereal void. The traffic in the streets *without*, the rumbling, and roaring and jarring of the great city, so loud a minute before, might have been a million miles away in some other world for all that he could hear or feel of its vibration.

In the red glow that pervaded the machine, emanating from a source he could not discover, the poet gazed at his companion. Vizaphmal had now resumed his Antarean form, as if all necessity for a human disguise were at an end, and he towered above Alvor, glorious with intermerging zones at fluctuant colors, where hues

the poet had not seen in any spectrum were simultaneous or intermittent with flaming blues and coruscating emeralds and amethysts and fulgurant purples and vermilions and saffrons. Lifting one of his five arms, which terminated in two finger-like appendages with many joints all capable of bending in any direction, the Antarean touched a thin wire that was stretched overhead between the two rods. He plucked at this wire like a musician at a lute-string, and from it there emanated a single clear note higher in pitch than anything Alvor had ever heard. Its sheer unearthly acuity caused a shudder of anguish to run through the poet, and he could scarcely have borne a prolongation of the sound, which, however, ceased in a moment and was followed by a much more endurable humming and singing noise which seemed to arise at his feet. Looking down, he saw that the large disk at the bottom of the medial rods had begun to revolve. This revolution was slow at first, but rapidly increased in its rate, till he could no longer see the movement; and the singing sound became agonizingly sweet and high till it pierced his senses like a knife.

Vizaphmal touched a second wire, and the revolution of the disk was brought abruptly to an end. Alvor felt an unspeak-

able relief at the cessation of the torturing music.

"We are now in etheric space," the Antarean declared. "Look out, if you so desire."

Alvor peered through the interstices of the dark metal, and saw around and above and below them the unlimited blackness of cosmic night and the teeming of unaccountable trillions of stars. He had a sensation of frightful and deadly vertigo, and staggered like a drunken man as he tried to keep himself from falling against the side of the machine.

Vizaphmal plucked at a third wire, but this time Alvor was not aware of any sound. Something that like an electric shock, and also like the crushing impact of a heavy blow, descended upon his head and shook him to soles of his feet. Then he felt as if his tissues were being stabbed by innumerable needles of fire, and then that he was being torn apart in a thousand thousand fragments, bone by bone, muscle by muscle, vein by vein, and nerve by nerve, on some invisible rack. He swooned and fell huddled in a corner of the machine, but his unconsciousness was not altogether complete. He seemed to be drowning beneath an infinite sea of darkness, beneath the accumulation of shoreless gulfs, and above this sea, so far away that he lost it again and again, there thrilled a supernal melo-

dy, sweet as the singing of sirens or the fabled music of the spheres, together with an insupportable dissonance like the shattering of all the battlements of time. He thought that all his nerves had been elongated to an enormous distance, where the outlying parts of himself were being tortured in the oubliettes of fantastic inquisitions by the use of instruments of percussion, diabolically vibrant, that were somehow identified with certain of his own body-cells. Once he thought that he saw Vizaphmal standing a million leagues remote on the shore of an alien planet, with a sky of soaring many-colored flame behind him and the night of all the universe rippling gently at his feet like a submissive ocean. Then he lost the vision, and the intervals of the far unearthly music became more prolonged, and at last he could not hear it at all, nor could he feel any longer the torturing of his remote nerve-ends. The gulf deepened above him, and he sank through eons of darkness and emptiness to the very nadir of oblivion.

2

ALVOR'S RETURN to consciousness was even more slow and gradual than his descent into Lethe had been. Still lying at the bottom of a shoreless and boundless night, he became

aware of an unidentifiable odor with which in some way the sense of ardent warmth was associated. This odor changed incessantly, as if it were composed of many diverse ingredients, each of which predominated in turn. Myrrh-like and mystic in the beginning as the fumes of an antique altar, it assumed the heavy languor of unimaginable flowers, the sharp sting of vaporizing chemicals unknown to science, the smell of exotic water and exotic earth, and then a medley of other elements that conveyed no suggestion of anything whatever, except of evolutionary realms and ranges that were beyond all human experience or calculation. For a while he lived and was awake only in his sensory response to this potpourri of odors; then the awareness of his own corporeal being came back to him through tactual sensations of an unusual order, which he did not at first recognize as being within himself, but which seemed to be those of a foreign entity in some other dimension, with whom he able gulfs by a nexus of gossamer tenuity. This entity, he was connected across unbridge-thought, was reclining on a material of great softness, into which he sank with a supreme and leaden indolence and a feeling of sheer bodily weight that held him utterly motionless. Then, floating along the ebon

cycles of the void, this being came with ineffable slowness toward Alvor, and at last, by no perceptible transition, by no breach of physical logic or mental congruity, was incorporate with him. Then a tiny light, like a star burning all alone in the center of infinitude, began to dawn far off; and it drew nearer and nearer and grew larger and larger till it turned the black void to a dazzling luminescence, to a many-tinted glory that smote full upon Alvor.

He found that he was lying with wide-open eyes on a huge couch, in a sort of pavilion consisting of a low and elliptical dome supported on double rows of diagonally fluted pillars. He was quite naked. He saw at a glance even though his brain-centers were still half benumbed as by the action of thrown across his lower limbs. though a sheet of some thin and pale yellow fabric had been some opiate, that this fabric was not the product of any terrestrial loom. Beneath his body, the couch was covered with gray and purple stuffs, but whether they were made of feathers, fur or cloth he was altogether uncertain, for they suggested all three of these materials. They were very thick and resilient, and accounted for the sense of extreme softness underneath him that had marked his return from the

swoon. The couch itself stood higher above the floor than an ordinary bed, and was also longer, and in his half-narcotized condition this troubled Alvor even more than other aspects of his situation which were far less normal and explicable.

Amazement grew upon him as he looked about with reviving faculties, for all that he saw and smelt and touched were totally foreign and unaccountable. The floor of the pavilion was wrought in a geometric marquetry of ovals, rhomboids and equilaterals, in white, black and yellow metals that no Earthly mine had ever disclosed; and the pillars were of the same three metals, regularly alternating. The dome alone was entirely of yellow. Not far from the couch, there stood on a squat tripod a dark and wide-mouthed vessel from which poured an opalescent vapor. Someone standing behind it, invisible through the cloud of gorgeous fumes, was fanning the vapor toward Alvor. He recognized it as the source of the myrrh-like odor that had first troubled his reanimating senses. It was quite agreeable but was borne away from him again and again by gusts of hot wind which brought into the pavilion a mixture of perfumes that were both sweet and acrid and

were altogether novel. Looking between the pillars, he saw the monstrous heads of towering blossoms with pagoda-like tiers of sultry, sullen petals, and beyond them a terraced landscape of low hills of mauve and nacarat soil, extending toward a horizon incredibly remote till they rose and rose against the heavens. Above all this was a whitish sky, filled with a blinding radiation of intense light from a sun that was now hidden by the dome. Alvor's eyes began to ache, the odors disturbed and oppressed him, and he was possessed by a terrible dubiety and perplexity, amid which he remembered vaguely his meeting with Vizaphmal, and the events preceding his swoon. He was unbearably nervous, and for some time all his ideas and sensations took on the painful disorder and irrational fears of incipient delirium.

A FIGURE stepped from behind the veering vapors and approached the couch. It was Vizaphmal, who bore in one of his five hands the large thin circular fan of bluish metal he had been using. He was holding in another hand a tubular cup, half full of an erubescant liquid.

"Drink this," he ordered, as he put the cup to Alvor's lips. The liquid was so bitter and fiery that Alvor could swallow

it only in sips, between periods of gasping and coughing. But once he had gotten it down, his brain cleared with celerity and all his sensations were soon comparatively normal.

"Where am I?" he asked. His voice sounded very strange and unfamiliar to him, and its effect bordered upon ventriloquism — which, as he afterward learned, was due to certain peculiarities of the atmospheric medium.

"You are on my country estate, in Ulphalor, a kingdom which occupies the whole northern hemisphere of Satabbor, the inmost planet of Sanarda, that sun which is called Antares in your world. You have been unconscious for three of our days, a result which I anticipated, knowing the profound shock your nervous system would receive from the experience through which you have passed. However, I do not think you will suffer any permanent illness or inconvenience; and I have just now administered to you a sovereign drug which will aid in the adjustment of your nerves and your corporeal functions to the novel conditions under which you are to live henceforward. I employed the opalescent vapor to arouse you from your swoon, when I deemed that it had become safe and wise to do this. The vapor is produced by the burning of an aromatic

seaweed, and is magisterial in its restorative effect."

Alvor tried to grasp the full meaning of this information, but his brain was still unable to receive anything more than a melange of impressions that were totally new and obscure and outlandish. As he pondered the words of Vizaphmal, he saw that rays of bright light had fallen between the columns and were creeping across the floor. Then the rim of a vast amber-colored sun descended below the rim of the dome and he felt an overwhelming, but somehow not insupportable, warmth. His eyes no longer ached, not even in the direct beams of this luminary; nor did the perfumes irritate him, as they had done for a while.

"I think," said Vizaphmal, "that you may now arise. It is afternoon, and there is much for you to learn, and much to be done."

ALVOR THREW off the thin covering of yellow cloth, and sat up, with his legs hanging over the edge of the couch.

"But my clothing?" he queried.

"You will need none in our climate. No one has ever worn anything of the sort in Satabbor."

Alvor digested this idea, and though he was slightly disconcerted, he made up his mind that he would accustom himself to whatever should be re-

quired of him. Anyway, the lack of his usual habiliments was far from disagreeable in the dry, sultry air of this new world.

He slid from the couch to the floor, which was nearly five feet below him, and took several steps. He was not weak or dizzy, as he had half expected, but all his movements were characterized by the same sense of extreme bodily weight of which he had been dimly aware while still in a semi-conscious condition.

"The world in which you now dwell is somewhat larger than your own," explained Vizaphmal, "and the force of gravity is proportionately greater. Your weight has been increased by no less than a third; but I think you will soon become habituated to this, as well as to the other novelties of your situation."

Motioning the poet to follow him, he led the way through that portion of the pavilion which had been behind Alvor's head as he lay on the couch. A spiral bridge of ascending stairs ran from this pavilion to a much larger pile where numerous wings and annexes of the same aerial architecture of domes and columns flared from a central edifice with a circular wall and many thin spires. Below the bridge, about the pavilion, and around the whole edifice above, were gardens of trees and flowers that caused Alvor to recall the things he had seen during his one ex-

periment with hashish. The foliation of the trees was either very fine and hair-like, or else it consisted of huge, semi-globular and discoid forms depending from horizontal branches and suggesting a novel union of fruit and leaf. Almost all colors, even green, were shown in the bark and foliage of these trees. The flowers were mainly similar to those Alvor had seen from the pavilion, but there were others of a short, puffy-stemmed variety, with no trace of leaves, and with malignant purple-black heads full of crimson mouths, which swayed a little even when there was no wind. There were oval pools and meandering streams of a dark water with irised glints all through this garden, which, with the columnar edifice, occupied the middle of a small plateau.

AS ALVOR followed his guide along the bridge, a perspective of hills and plains all marked out in geometric diamonds and squares and triangles, with a large lake or island sea in their midst, was revealed momentarily. Far in the distance, more than a hundred leagues away, were the gleaming domes and towers of some baroque city, toward which the enormous orb of the sun was now declining. When he looked at this sun and saw the whole extent of its diameter for the first time, he felt

an overpowering thrill of imaginative awe and wonder and exultation at the thought that it was identical with the red star to which he had addressed in another world the half-lyric, half-ironic lines of his ode.

At the end of the spiral bridge, they came to a second and more spacious pavilion, in which stood a high table with many seats attached to it by means of curving rods. Table and chairs were of the same material, a light, grayish metal. As they entered this pavilion, two strange beings appeared and bowed before Vizaphmal. They were like the scientist in their organic structure, but were not so tall, and their coloring was very drab and dark, with no hint of opalescence. By certain bizarre indications Alvor surmised that the two beings were of different sexes.

"You are right," said Vizaphmal, reading his thought. "These persons are a male and female of the two inferior sexes called Abbars, who constitute the workers, as well as the breeders, of our world. There are two superior sexes, who are sterile, and who form the intellectual, esthetic and ruling classes, to whom I belong. We call ourselves the Alphads. The Abbars are more numerous, but we hold them in close subjection; and even though they are our parents as well as our slaves, the ideas of filial piety which pre-

vail in your world would be regarded as truly singular by us. We supervise their breeding, so that the due proportion of Abbars and Alphads may be maintained, and the character of the progeny is determined by the injection of certain serums at the time of conceiving. We ourselves, though sterile, are capable of what you call love, and our amorous delights are more complex than yours in their nature."

He now turned and addressed the two Abbars. The phonetic forms and combinations that issued from his lips were unbelievably different from those of the scholarly English in which he had spoken to Alvor. There were strange gutturals and linguals and oddly prolonged vowels which Alvor, for all his subsequent attempts to learn the language, could never quite approximate and which argued a basic divergence in the structure of the vocal organs of Vizaphmal from that of his own.

Bowing till their heads almost touched the floor, the two Abbars disappeared among the columns in a wing of the building and soon returned, carrying long trays on which were unknown foods and beverages in utensils of unearthly forms.

"Be seated," said Vizaphmal. The meal that followed was far from unpleasant, and the foodstuffs were quite palatable, though Alvor was not sure

whether they were meats or vegetables. He learned that they were really both, for his host explained that they were the prepared fruits of plants which were half animal in their cellular composition and characteristics. These plants grew wild, and were hunted with the same care that would be required in hunting dangerous beasts, on account of their mobile branches and the poisonous darts with which they were armed. The two beverages were a pale, colorless wine with an acrid flavor, made from a root, and a dusky, sweetish liquid, the natural water of this world. Alvor noticed that the water had a saline after-taste.

"The time has now come," announced Vizaphmal at the end of the meal, "to explain frankly the reason why I have brought you here. We will now adjourn to that portion of my home which you would term a laboratory, or workshop, and which also includes my library."

They passed through several pavilions and winding colonnades, and reached the circular wall at the core of the edifice. Here a high narrow door, engraved with heteroclitic ciphers, gave admission to a huge room without windows, lit by a yellow glow whose cause was not ascertainable.

"The walls and ceiling are lined with a radioactive substance," said Vizaphmal, "which

affords this illumination. The vibrations of this substance are also highly stimulating to the processes of thought."

ALVOR LOOKED about him at the room, which was filled with alembics and cupels and retorts and sundry other scientific mechanisms, all of unfamiliar types and materials. He could not even surmise their use. Beyond them, in a corner, he saw the apparatus of intersecting bars, with the two heavy disks, in which he and Vizaphmal had made their passage through etheric space. Around the walls there were a number of deep shelves, laden with great rolls that were like the volumes of the ancients.

Vizaphmal selected one of these rolls, and started to unfurl it. It was four feet wide, was gray in color, and was closely written with many columns of dark violet and maroon characters that ran horizontally instead of up and down.

"It will be necessary," said Vizaphmal, "to tell you a few facts regarding the history, religion and intellectual temper of our world, before I read to you the singular prophecy contained in one of the columns of this ancient chronicle.

"We are a very old people, and the beginnings, or even the first maturity of our civilization, antedate the appearance of the lowliest forms of life on

your Earth. Religious sentiment and the veneration of the past have always been dominant factors among us, and have shaped our history to an amazing extent. Even today, the whole mass of the Abbars and the majority of the Alphads are immersed in superstition, and the veriest details of quotidian life are regulated by sacerdotal law. A few scientists and thinkers, like myself, are above all such puerilities; but, strictly between you and me, the Alphads, for all their superior and highly aristocratic traits, are mainly the victims of arrested development in this regard. They have cultivated the epicurean and esthetic side of life to a high degree, they are accomplished artists, sybarites and able administrators or politicians; but, intellectually, they have not freed themselves from the chains of a sterile pantheism and an all too prolific hierarchy.

"Several cycles ago, in what might be called an early period of our history, the worship of all our sundry deities was at its height. There was at this time a veritable eruption, a universal plague of prophets, who termed themselves the voices of the gods, even as similarly-minded persons have done in your world. Each of these prophets made his own especial joblot of predictions, often quite minutely worked out and elaborate, and sometimes far from

lacking in imaginative quality. A number of these prophecies have since been fulfilled to the letter, which, as you may well surmise, has helped enormously in confirming the hold of religion. However, between ourselves, I suspect that their fulfilment has had behind it more or less of a shrewd instrumentality, supplied by those who could profit therefrom in one way or another.

"There was one vates, Abbolechiolor by name, who was even more fertile-minded and long-winded than his fellows. I shall now translate to you, from the volumen I have just enrolled, a prediction that he made in the year 299 of the cycle of Sargholoth, the third of the seven epochs into which our known history has been subdivided. It runs thus:

"When, for the second time following this prediction, the two outmost moons of Satabbor shall be simultaneously darkened in a total eclipse by the third and innermost moon, and when the dim night of this occultation shall have worn away in the dawn, a mighty wizard shall appear in city of Sarpoulom, before the palace of the kings of Ulphalor, accompanied by a most unique and unheard-of monster with two arms, two legs, two eyes and a white skin. And he that then rules in Ulphalor shall be deposed ere noon of this day, and

the wizard shall be enthroned in his place, to reign as long as the white monster shall abide with him.' ”

VIZAPHMAL PAUSED, as if to give Alvor a chance to cogitate the matters that had been presented to him. Then, while his three eyes assumed a look of quizzical sharpness and shrewdness, he continued:

“Since the promulgation of this prophecy, there has already been one total eclipse of our two outer moons by the inner one. And, according to all the calculations of our astronomers, in which I can find no possible flaw, a second similar eclipse is now about to take place — in fact, it is due this very night. If Abbolechiolor was truly inspired, tomorrow morn is the time when the prophecy will be fulfilled. However, I decided some while ago that its fulfilment should not be left to chance; and one of my purposes in designing the mechanism with which I visited your world, was to find a monster who would meet the specifications of Abbolechiolor. No creature of this anomalous kind has ever been known, or even fabled, to exist in Satabbor; and I made a thorough search of many remote and outlying planets without being able to obtain what I required. In some of these worlds there were monsters of very uncommon types, with an almost unlimited number of visual or-

gans and limbs; but the variety to which you belong, with only two eyes, two arms, and two legs, must indeed be rare throughout the infragalactic universe, since I have not discovered it in any other planet than your own.

“I am sure that you now conceive the project I have long nurtured. You and I will appear at dawn in Sarpoulom, the capital of Ulphalor, whose domes and towers you saw this afternoon far off on the plain. Because of the celebrated prophecy, and the publicly known calculations regarding the imminence of a second two-fold eclipse, a great crowd will doubtless be gathered before the palace of the kings to await whatever shall occur. Akkiel, the present king, is by no means popular, and your advent in company with me, who am widely famed as a wizard, will be the signal for his dethronement. I shall then be ruler in his place, even as Abbolechiolor has to thoughtfully predicted. The holding of supreme temporal power in Ulphalor is not undesirable, even for one who is wise and learned and above most of the vanities of life, as I am. When this honor has devolved upon my unworthy shoulders, I shall be able to offer you, as a reward for your miraculous aid, an existence of rare and sybaritic luxury, of rich and varied sensation, such as you can hardly have imagined. It is true, no

doubt, that you will be doomed to a certain loneliness among us: you will always be looked upon as a monster, a portentous anomaly; but such, I believe, was your lot in the world where I found you and where you were about to cast yourself into a most unpleasant river. There, as you have learned, all poets are regarded as no less anomalous than double-headed snakes or five-legged calves."

Alvor had listened to this speech in manifold and ever-increasing amazement. Toward the end, when there was no longer any doubt concerning Vizaphmal's intention, he felt the sting of a bitter and curious irony at the thought of the role he was destined to play. However, he could do no less than admit the cogency of Vizaphmal's final argument.

"I trust," said Vizaphmal, "that I have not injured your feelings by my frankness, or by the position in which I am about to place you."

"Oh, no, not at all," Alvor hastened to assure him.

"In that case, we shall soon begin our journey to Sarpoulom, which will take all night. Of course, we could make the trip in the flash of an instant with my space-annihilator, or in a few minutes with one of the air-machines that have long been employed among us. But I intend to use a very old-fashioned mode of conveyance

for the occasion, so that we will arrive in the proper style, at the proper time, and also that you may enjoy our scenery and view the double eclipse at leisure."

WHEN THEY emerged from the windowless room, the colonnades and pavilions without were full of a rosy light, though the sun was still an hour above the horizon. This, Alvor learned, was the usual prelude of a Sataborian sunset. He and Vizaphmal watched while the whole landscape before them became steeped in the ruddy glow, which deepened through shades of cinnabar and ruby to a rich garnet by the time Antares had begun to sink from sight. When the huge orb had disappeared, the intervening lands took on a fiery amethyst, and tall auroral flames of a hundred hues shot upward to the zenith from the sunken sun. Alvor was spellbound by the glory of the spectacle.

Turning from this magnificent display at an unfamiliar sound, he saw that a singular vehicle had been brought by the Abbars to the steps of the pavilion in which they stood. It was more like a chariot than anything else, and was drawn by three animals undreamt of in human fable or heraldry. These animals were black and hairless, their bodies were extremely long, each of them had eight legs and a forked tail, and their

whole aspect, including their flat, venomous triangular heads, was uncomfortably serpentine. A series of green and scarlet wattles hung from their throats and bellies, and semi-translucent membranes, erigible at will, were attached to their sides.

"You behold," Vizaphmal informed Alvor, "the traditional conveyance that has been used since time immemorial by all orthodox wizards in Ulphalor. These creatures are called *orpods*, and they are among the swiftest of our mammalian serpents."

He and Alvor seated themselves in the vehicle. Then the three *orpods*, who had no reins in all their complicated harness, started off at a word of command on a spiral road that ran from Vizaphmal's home to the plain beneath. As they went, they erected the membranes at their sides and soon attained an amazing speed.

Now, for the first time, Alvor saw the three moons of Satabbor, which had risen opposite the afterglow. They were all large, especially the innermost one, a perceptible warmth was shed by their pink rays, and their combined illumination was nearly as clear and bright as that of a terrestrial day.

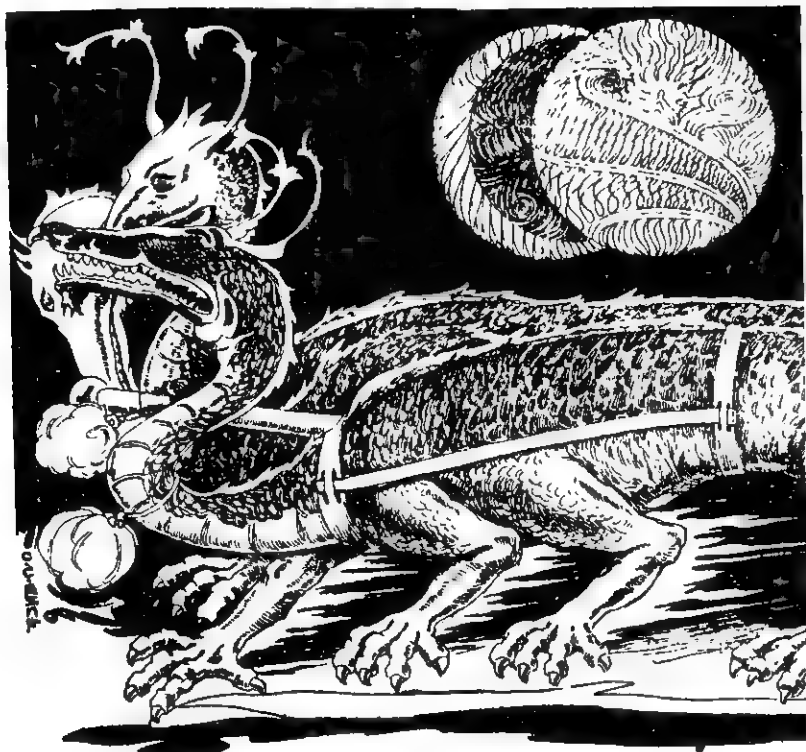
The land through which Vizaphmal and the poet now passed was uninhabited, in spite of its nearness to Sarpoulom; and they met no one. Alvor learned that

the terraces he had seen upon awaking were not the work of intelligent beings, as he had thought, but were a natural formation of the hills. Vizaphmal had chosen this location for his home because of the solitude and privacy, so desirable for the scientific experiments to which he had devoted himself.

After they had traversed many leagues, they began to pass occasional houses, of a like structure to that of Vizaphmal's. Then the road meandered along the rim of cultivated fields, which Alvor recognized as the source of the geometric divisions he had seen from afar during the day. He was told that these fields were given mainly to the growing of root-vegetables, of a gigantic truffle, and a kind of succulent cactus, which formed the chief foods of the Abbars. The Alphads ate by choice only the meat of animals and the fruits of wild, half-animal plants, such as those with which Alvor had been served.

BY MIDNIGHT the three moons had drawn very close together and the second moon had begun to occlude the outermost. Then the inner moon came slowly across the others, till in an hour's time the eclipse was complete. The diminution of light was very marked, and the whole effect was now similar to that of a moonlit night on Earth.

"It will be morning in a little

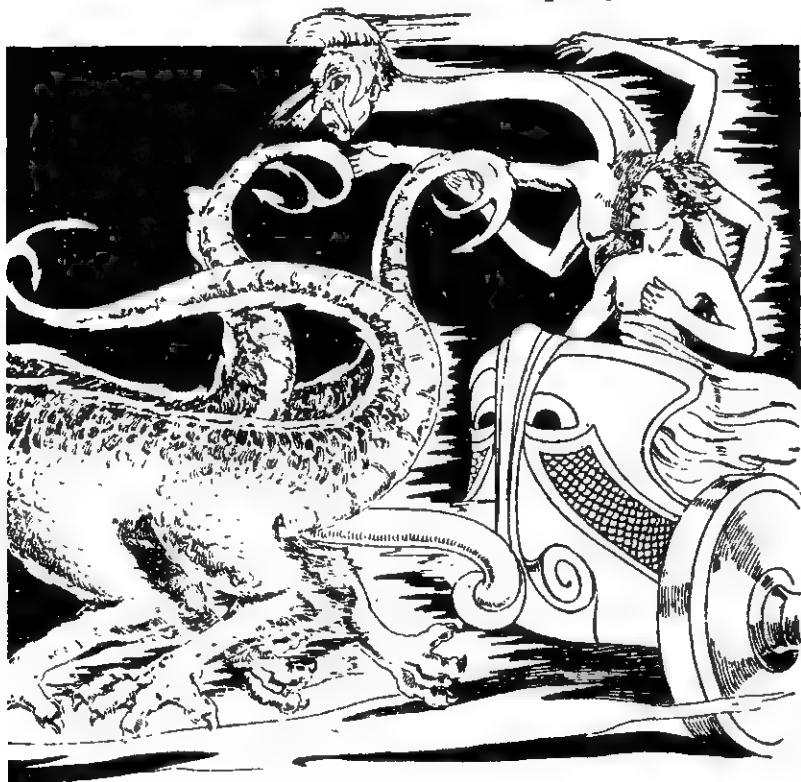


more than two hours," said Vizaphmal, "since our nights are extremely short at this time of year. The eclipse will be over before then. But there is no need for us to hurry."

He spoke to the *orpods*, who folded their membranes and settled to a sort of trot.

Sarpoulom was now visible in the heart of the plain, and its outlines were rendered more distinct as the two hidden moons

began to draw forth from the adumbration of the other. When to this triple light the ruby rays of earliest morn were added, the city loomed upon the travelers with fantastic many-storied piles of that same open type of metal architecture which the home of Vizaphmal had displayed. This architecture, Alvor found, was general throughout the land, though an older type with closed walls was occasion-



ally to be met with, and was used altogether in the building of prisons and the inquisitions maintained by the priesthoods of the various deities.

It was an incredible vision that Alvor saw — a vision of high domes upborne on slender elongated columns, tier above tier, of airy colonnades and bridges and hanging gardens loftier than Babylon or than Babel, all tinged by the ever-

changing red that accompanied and followed the Satabborian dawn, even as it had preceded the sunset. Into this vision, along streets that were paven with the same metal as that of the buildings, Alvor and Vizaphmal were drawn by the three *orpods*.

The poet was overcome by the sense of an unimaginably old and alien and diverse life which descended upon him from

these buildings. He was surprised to find that the streets were nearly deserted and that little sign of activity was manifest anywhere. A few Abbars, now and then, scuttled away in alleys or entrances at the approach of the *oropods*, and two beings of a coloration similar to that of Vizaphmal, one of whom Alvor took to be a female, issued from a colonnade and stood staring at the travelers in evident stupefaction.

When they had followed a sort of winding avenue for more than a mile, Alvor saw between and above the edifices in front of them the domes and upper tiers of a building that surpassed all the others in its extent.

"You now behold the palace of the kings of Ulphalor," his companion told him.

IN A LITTLE while they emerged upon a great square that surrounded the palace. This square was crowded with the people of the city, who, as Vizaphmal had surmised, were all gathered to await the fulfilment of the prophecy of Abbolechiolor. The open galleries and arcades of the huge edifice, which rose to a height of ten stories, were also laden with watching figures. Abbars were the most plentiful element in this throng, but there were also multitudes of the gayly colored Alphads among them.

At sight of Alvor and his com-

panion, a perceptible movement, a sort of communal shuddering which soon grew convulsive, ran through the whole assemblage in the square and along the galleries of the edifice above. Loud cries of a peculiar shrillness and harshness arose, there was a strident sound of beaten metal in the heart of the palace, like the gongs of an alarm, and mysterious lights glowed out and were extinguished in the higher stories. Clangors of unknown machines, the moan and roar and shriek of strange instruments, were audible above the clamor of the crowd, which grew more tumultuous and agitated in its motion. A way was opened for the car drawn by the three *oropods*, and Vizaphmal and Alvor were soon at the entrance of the palace.

There was an unreality about it all to Alvor, and the discomfiture he had felt in drawing upon himself the weird phosphoric gaze of ten thousand eyes, all of whom were now intent with a fearsome uncanny curiosity on every detail of his physique, was like the discomfiture of some absurd and terrible dream. The movement of the crowd had ceased, while the car was passing along the unhuman lane that had been made for it, and there was an interval of silence. Then, once more, there were babble and debate, and cries that had the accent of martial orders or sum-

monses were caught up and repeated. The throng began to move, with a new and more concentric swirling, and the foremost ranks of Abbars and Alphads swelled like a dark and tinted wave into the colonnades of the palace. They climbed the pillars with a dreadful swift agility to the stories above, they thronged the courts and pavilions and arcades, and though a weak resistance was apparently put up by those within, there was nothing that could stem them.

Through all this clangor and clamor and tumult, Vizaphmal stood in the car with an imperturbable mien beside the poet. Soon a number of Alphads, evidently a delegation, issued from the palace and made obeisance to the wizard, whom they addressed in humble and supplicative tones.

"A revolution has been precipitated by our advent," explained Vizaphmal, "and Akkiel the King has fled. The chamberlains of the court and the high priests of all our local deities are now offering me the throne of Ulphalor. Thus the prophecy is being fulfilled to the letter. You must agree with me that the great Abbolechiolor was happily inspired."

3

THE CEREMONY of Vizaphmal's enthronement was held

almost immediately, in a huge hall at the core of the palace, open like all the rest of the structure, and with columns of colossal size. The throne was a great globe of azure metal, with a seat hollowed out near the top, accessible by means of a serpentine flight of stairs. Alvor, at an order issued by the wizard, was allowed to stand at the base of this globe with some of the Alphads.

The enthronement itself was quite simple. The wizard mounted the stairs, amid the silence of a multitude that had thronged the hall, and seated himself in the hollow of the great globe. Then a very tall and distinguished-looking Alphad also climbed the steps, carrying a heavy rod, one half of which was green, and the other a swart, sullen crimson, and placed this rod in the hands of Vizaphmal. Later, Alvor was told that the crimson end of this rod could emit a death-dealing ray, and the green a vibration that cured almost all the kinds of illness to which the Sataborians were subject. Thus it was more than symbolical of the twofold power of life and death with which the king had been invested.

The ceremony was now at an end, and the gathering quickly dispersed. Alvor, at the command of Vizaphmal, was installed in a suite of open apartments on the third story of the palace, at the end of many

labyrinthin stairs. A dozen Ab-bars, who were made his personal retainers, soon came in, each carrying a different food or drink. The foods were beyond belief in their strangeness, for they included the eggs of a moth-like insect large as a plover, and the apples of a fungoid tree that grew in the craters of dead volcanoes. They were served in ewers of a white and shining mineral, upborne on legs of fantastic length, and wrought with a cunning artistry. Likewise he was given, in shallow bowls, a liquor made from the blood-like juice of living plants, and a wine in which the narcotic pollen of some night-blooming flower had been dissolved.

The days and weeks that now followed were, for the poet, an experience beyond the visionary resources of any terrestrial drug. Step by step, he was initiated, as much as possible for one so radically alien, into the complexities and singularities of life in a new world. Gradually his nerves and his mind, by the aid of the erubescant liquid which Vizaphmal continued to administer to him at intervals, became habituated to the strong light and heat, the intense radiative properties of a soil and atmosphere with unearthly chemical constituents, the strange foods and beverages, and the people themselves with their queer anatomy and queerer

customs. Tutors were engaged to teach him the language, and, in spite of the difficulties presented by certain unmanageable consonants, certain weird uluative vowels, he learned enough of it to make his simpler ideas and wants understood.

He saw Vizaphmal every day, and the new king seemed to cherish a real gratitude toward him for his indispensable aid in the fulfilment of the prophecy. Vizaphmal took pains to instruct him in regard to all that it was necessary to know, and kept him well-informed as to the progress of public events in Ulphalor. He was told, among other things, that no news had been heard concerning the whereabouts of Akkiael, the late ruler. Also, Vizaphmal had reason to be aware of more or less opposition toward himself on the part of the various priesthoods, who, in spite of his life-long discretion, had somehow learned of his free-thinking propensities.

For all the attention, kindness and service that he received, and the unique luxury with which he was surrounded, Alvor felt that these people, even as the wizard had forewarned him, looked upon him merely as a kind of unnatural curiosity or anomaly. He was no less monstrous to them than they were to him, and the gulf created by the laws of a diverse biology, by an alien trend of evolution, seemed impossible to

bridge in any manner. He was questioned by many of them, and, in especial, by more than one delegation of noted scientists, who desired to know as much as he could tell them about himself. But the queries were so patronizing, so rude and narrow-minded and scornful and smug, that he was soon wont to feign a total ignorance of the language on such occasions. Indeed, there was a gulf; and he was rendered even more acutely conscious of it whenever he met any of the female Abbars or Alphads of the court, who eyed him with disdainful inquisitiveness, and among whom a sort of tittering usually arose when he passed. His naked members, so limited in number, were obviously as great a source of astonishment to them as their own somewhat intricate and puzzling charms were to him. All of them were quite nude; indeed, nothing, not even a string of jewels or a single gem, was ever worn by any of the Satabborians. The female Alphads, like the males, were extremely tall and were gorgeous with epidermic hues that would have outdone the plumage of any peacock; and their anatomical structure was most peculiar. . . . Alvor began to feel the loneliness of which Vizaphmal had spoken, and he was overcome at times by a great nostalgia for his own world, by a planetary homesickness. He became atro-

ciously nervous; even if not actually ill.

WHILE HE was still in this condition, Vizaphmal took him on a tour of Ulphalor that had become necessary for political reasons. More or less incredulity concerning the real existence of such a monstrosity as Alvor had been expressed by the folk of outlying provinces, of the polar realms and the antipodes, and the new ruler felt that a visual demonstration of the two-armed, two-legged and two-eyed phenomenon would be far from inadvisable, to establish beyond dispute the legitimacy of his own claim to the throne. In the course of this tour, they visited many unique cities, and rural and urban centers of industries peculiar to Satabbor; and Alvor saw the mines from which the countless minerals and metals used in Ulphalor were extracted by the toil of millions of Abbars. These metals were found in a pure state, and were of inexhaustible extent. Also, he saw the huge oceans, which, with certain inland seas and lakes that were fed from underground sources, formed the sole water-supply of the aging planet, where no rain had ever been rumored to fall for centuries. The seawater, after undergoing a treatment that purged it of a number of undesirable elements, was carried all through the land by a system of conduits. More-

over, he saw the marshlands at the north pole, with their vicious tangle of animate vegetation, into which no one had ever tried to penetrate.

They met many outland peoples in the course of this tour; but the general characteristics were the same throughout Ulphalor, except in one or two races of the lowest aborigines, among whom there were no Alphads. Everywhere the poet was eyed with the same cruel and ignorant curiosity that had been shown in Sarpculom. However, he became gradually inured to this, and the varying spectacles of bizarre interest and the unheard-of scenes that he saw daily, helped to divert him a little from his nostalgia for the lost Earth.

When he and Vizaphmal returned to Sarpculom, after an absence of many weeks, they found that much discontent and revolutionary sentiment had been sown among the multitude by the hierarchies of the Satabborian gods and goddesses, particularly by the priesthood of Cuthamosi, the Cosmic Mother, a female deity in high favor among the two reproductive sexes, from whom the lower ranks of her hierophants were recruited. Cuthamosi was worshipped as the source of all things: her maternal organs were believed to have given birth to the sun, the moon, the world, the stars,

the planets, and even the meteors which often fell in Satabbor. But it was argued by her priests that such a monstrosity as Alvor could not possibly have issued from her womb, and that therefore his very existence was a kind of blasphemy, and that the rule of the heretic wizard, Vizaphmal, based on the advent of this abnormality, was likewise a flagrant insult to the Cosmic Mother. They did not deny the apparently miraculous fulfilment of the prophecy of Abbolechiolor, but it was maintained that this fulfilment was no assurance of the perpetuity of Vizaphmal's reign, and no proof that his reign was countenanced by any of the gods.

"I can not conceal from you," said Vizaphmal to Alvor, "that the position in which we both stand is now slightly parlous. I intend to bring the space-annihilator from my country home to the court, since it is not impossible that I may have need for it, and that some foreign sphere will soon become more salubrious for me than my native one."

However, it would seem that this able scientist, alert wizard and competent king had not altogether grasped the real imminence of the danger that threatened his reign; or else he spoke, as was sometimes his wont, with sardonic moderation. He showed no further concern, beyond setting a strong

guard about Alvor to attend him at all times, lest an attempt should be made to kidnap the poet in consideration of the last clause of the prophecy.

THREE DAYS after the return to Sarpoulom, while Alvor was standing in one of his private balconies looking out over the roofs of the town, with his guards chattering idly in the rooms behind, he saw that the streets were dark with a horde of people, mainly Abbars, who were streaming silently toward the palace. A few Alphads, distinguishable even at a distance by their gaudy hues, were at the head of this throng. Alarmed at the spectacle, and remembering what the king had told him, he went to find Vizaphmal and climbed the eternal tortuous series of complicated stairs that led to the king's personal suite. Others among the inmates of the court had seen the advancing crowd, and there were agitation, terror and frantic hurry everywhere. Mounting the last flight of steps to the king's threshold, Alvor was astounded to find that many of the Abbars, who had gained ingress from the other side of the palace and had scaled the successive rows of columns and stairs with ape-like celerity, were already pouring into the room. Vizaphmal himself was standing before the open framework of the space-annihilator, which had

now been installed beside his couch. The rod of royal investiture was in his hand, and he was levelling the crimson end at the foremost of the invading Abbars. As this creature leapt toward him, waving an atrocious weapon lined by a score of hooked blades, Vizaphmal tightened his hold on the rod, thus pressing a secret spring, and a thin rose-colored ray of light was emitted from the end, causing the Abbar to crumple and fall. Others, in nowise deterred, ran forward to succeed him, and the king turned his lethal beam upon them with the calm air of one who is conducting a scientific experiment, till the floor was piled with dead Abbars. Still others took their place, and some began to cast their hooked weapons at the king. None of these touched him, but he seemed to weary of the sport, and stepping within the framework, he closed it upon himself. A moment more, and then there was a roar as of a thousand thunders, and the mechanism and Vizaphmal were no longer to be seen. Never, at any future time, was the poet to learn what had become of him, nor in what stranger world than Satabbor he was now indulging his scientific fancies and curiosities.

Alvor had no time to feel, as he might conceivably have done, that he had been basely deserted by the king. All the

nether and upper stories of the great edifice were now a-swarm with the invading crowd, who were no longer silent, but were uttering shrill, ferocious cries as they bore down the opposition of the courtiers and slaves. The whole place was inundated by an ever-mounting sea, in which there were now myriads of Alphads as well as of Abbars; and no escape was possible. In a few instants, Alvor himself was seized by a group of the Abbars, who seemed to have been enraged rather than terrified or discomforted by the vanishing of Vizaphmal. He recognized them as priests of Cunthamosi by an odd oval and vertical marking of red pigments on their swart bodies. They bound him viciously with cords that were made from the intestines of a dragon-like animal, and carried him away from the palace, along streets that were lined by a staring and gibbering mob, to a building on the southern outskirts of Sarpoulom, which Vizaphmal had once pointed out to him as the Inquisition of the Cosmic Mother.

This edifice, unlike most of the buildings in Sarpoulom, was walled on all sides and was constructed entirely of enormous gray bricks, made from the local soil, and bigger and harder than blocks of granite. In a long five-sided chamber illumined only by narrow slits in the roof, Alvor found himself

arraigned before a jury of the priests, presided over by a swollen and pontifical-looking Alphad, the Grand Inquisitor.

THE PLACE was filled with ingenious and grotesque implements of torture, and the very walls were hung to the ceiling with contrivances that would have put Torquemada to shame. Some of them were very small, and were designed for the treatment of special and separate nerves; and others were intended to harrow the entire epidermic area of the body at a single twist of their screw-like mechanism.

Alvor could understand little of the charges that were preferred against him, but gathered that they were the same, or included the same, of which Vizaphmal had spoken — to wit, that he, Alvor, was a monstrosity that could never have been conceived or brought forth by Cunthamosi, and whose very existence, past, present and future, was a dire affront to this divinity. The entire scene — the dark and lurid room with its array of hellish instruments, the diabolic faces of the inquisitors, and the high unhuman drone of their voices as they intoned the charges and brought judgment against Alvor — was laden with a horror beyond the horror of dreams.

Presently the Grand Inquisitor focussed the malign gleam

of his three unblinking orbs upon the poet, and began to pronounce an interminable sentence, pausing a little at quite regular intervals which seemed to mark the clauses of the punishment that was to be inflicted. These clauses were well-nigh innumerable, but Alvor could comprehend almost nothing of what was said; and doubtless it was as well that he did not comprehend.

When the voice of the swollen Alphad had ceased, the poet was led away through endless corridors and down a stairway that seemed to descend into the bowels of Satabbor. These corridors, and also the stairway, were luminous with self-emitted light that resembled the phosphorescence of decaying matter in tombs and catacombs. As Alvor went downward with his guards, who were all Abbars of the lowest type, he could hear somewhere in sealed unknowable faults the moan and shriek of beings who endured the ordeals imposed by the inquisitors of Cunthamosi.

They came to the final step of the stairway, where, in a vast vault, an abyss whose bottom was not discernible yawned in the center of the floor. On its edge there stood a fantastic sort of windlass on which was wound an immense coil of blackish rope.

The end of this rope was now tied about Alvor's ankles, and he was lowered head down-

ward. The sides were not luminous like those of the stairway, and he could see nothing. But, as he descended into the gulf, the terrible discomfort of his position was increased by sensations of an ulterior origin. He felt that he was passing through a kind of hairy material with numberless filaments that clung to his head and body and limbs like minute tentacles, and whose contact gave rise to an immediate itching. The substance impeded him more and more, till at last he was held immovably suspended as in a net, and all the while the separate hairs seemed to be biting into his flesh with a million microscopic teeth, till the initial itching was followed by a burning and a deep convulsive throbbing more exquisitely painful than the flames of an *auto da fe*. The poet learned long afterward that the material into which he had been lowered was a subterranean organism, half vegetable, half animal, which grew from the side of the gulf, with long mobile feelers that were extremely poisonous to the touch. But at the time, not the least of the horrors he underwent was the uncertainty as to its precise nature.

AFTER HE had hung for quite a while in this agonizing web, and had become almost unconscious from the pain and

the unnatural position, Alvor felt that he was being drawn upward. A thousand of the fine thread-like tentacles clung to him and his whole body was encircled with a mesh of insufferable pangs as he broke loose from them. He swooned with the intensity of this pain, and when he recovered, he was lying on the floor at the edge of the gulf, and one of the priests was prodding him with a many-pointed weapon.

Alvor gazed for a moment at the cruel visages of his tormentors, in the luminous glow from the sides of the vault, and wondered dimly what infernal torture was next to follow, in the carrying-out of the interminable sentence that had been pronounced. He surmised, of course, that the one he had just undergone was mild in comparison to the many that would succeed it. But he never knew, for at that instant there came a crashing sound like the fall and shattering of the universe; the walls, the floor and the stairway rocked to and fro in a veritable convulsion, and the vault above was riven in sunder, letting through a rain of fragments of all sizes, some of which struck several of the inquisitors and swept them into the gulf. Others of the priests leapt over the edge in their terror, and the two who remained were in no condition to continue their official duties. Both of them were

lying beside Alvor with broken heads from which, in lieu of blood, there issued a glutinous light-green liquid.

Alvor could not imagine what had happened, but knew only that he himself was unhurt, as far as the results of the cataclysm were concerned. His mental state was not one to admit of scientific surmise: he was sick and dizzy from the ordeal he had suffered, and his whole body was swollen, was blood-red and violently burning from the touch of the organisms in the gulf. He had, however, enough strength and presence of mind to grope with his bound hands for the weapon that had been dropped by one of the inquisitors. By much patience, by untiring ingenuity, he was able to cut the thongs about his wrists and ankles on the sharp blade of one of the five points.

Carrying this weapon, which he knew that he might need, he began the ascent of the subterranean stairway. The steps were half blocked by fallen masses of stone, and some of the landings and stairs, as well as the sides of the wall, were cloven with enormous rents; and his egress was by no means an easy matter. When he reached the top, he found that the whole edifice was a pile of shattered walls, with a great pit in its center from which a cloud of vapors issued. An immense meteor had fallen, and had struck

the Inquisition of the Cosmic Mother.

Alvor was in no condition to appreciate the irony of this event, but at least he was able to comprehend his chance of freedom. The only inquisitors now visible were lying with squashed bodies whose heads or feet protruded from beneath the large squares of overthrown brick, and Alvor lost no time in quitting the vicinity.

It was now night, and only one of the three moons had arisen. Alvor struck off through the level arid country to the south of Sarpoulom, where no one dwelt, with the idea of crossing the boundaries of Ulphalor into one of the independent kingdoms that lay below the equator. He remembered Vizaphmal telling him once that the people of these kingdoms were more enlightened and less priest-ridden than those of Ulphalor.

All night he wandered in a sort of daze that was at times delirium. The pain of his swollen limbs increased, and he grew feverish. The moonlit plain seemed to shift and waver before him, but was interminable as the landscape of a hashish-dream. Presently the other two moons arose, and in the overtaxed condition of his mind and nerves, he was never quite sure as to their actual number. Usually, there appeared to be more than three, and this troubled

him prodigiously. He tried to resolve the problem for hours, as he staggered on, and at last, a little before dawn, he became altogether delirious.

He was unable afterward to recall anything about his subsequent journey. Something impelled him to go on even when his thews were dead and his brain an utter blank: he knew nothing of the waste and terrible lands through which he roamed in the hour-long ruby-red of morn and beneath a furnace-like sun; nor did he know when he crossed the equator at sunset and entered Omanorion, the realm of the empress Ambiala, still carrying in his hand the five-pointed weapon of one of the dead inquisitors.

4

IT WAS NIGHT when Alvor awoke, but he had no means of surmising that it was not the same night in which he had fled from the Inquisition of the Cosmic Mother; and that many Satabborian days had gone by since he had fallen totally exhausted and unconscious within the boundary-line of Omanorion. The warm, rosy beams of the three moons were full in his face, but he could not know whether they were ascending or declining. Anyhow, he was lying on a very comfortable couch that was not quite so disconcertingly long and high as the

one upon which he had first awakened in Ulphalor. He was in an open pavilion, and this pavilion was also a bower of multitudinous blossoms which leaned toward him with faces that were both grotesque and weirdly beautiful, from vines that had scaled the columns, or from the many curious metal pots that stood upon the floor. The air that he breathed was a medley of perfumes more exotic than frangipani; they were extravagantly sweet and spicy, but somehow he did not find them oppressive. Rather, they served to augment the deep, delightful languor of all his sensations.

As he opened his eyes and turned a little on the couch, a female Alphad, not so tall as those of Ulphalor and really quite of his own stature, came out from behind the flower-pots and addressed him. Her language was not that of the Ulphalorians, it was softer and less unhuman, and though he could not understand a word, he was immediately aware of a sympathetic note or undertone which, so far, he had never heard on the lips of any one in this world, not even Vizaphmal.

He replied in the language of Ulphalor, and found that he was understood. He and the female Alphad now carried on as much of a conversation as Alvor's linguistic abilities would permit. He learned that he was talking to the empress Ambiala, the

sole and supreme ruler of Omanorion, a quite extensive realm contiguous to Ulphalor. She told him that some of her servitors, while out hunting the wild, ferocious, half-animal fruits of the region, had found him lying unconscious near a thicket of the deadly plants that bore these fruits, and had brought him to her palace in Lompior, the chief city of Omanorion. There, while he still lay in a week-long stupor, he had been treated with medicaments that had now almost cured the painful swellings resultant from his plunge among the hair-like organism in the Inquisition.

With genuine courtesy, the empress forbore to question the poet regarding himself, nor did she express any surprize at his anatomical peculiarities. However, her whole manner gave evidence of an eager and even fascinated interest, for she did not take her eyes away from him at any time. He was a little embarrassed by her intent scrutiny, and to cover this embarrassment, as well as to afford her the explanations due to so kind a hostess, he tried to tell her as much as he could of his own history and adventures. It was doubtful if she understood more than half of what he said, but even this half obviously lent him an increasingly portentous attraction in her eyes. All of her three orbs grew round with wonder at the tale

related by this fantastic Ulysses, and whenever he stopped she would beg him to go on. The garnet and ruby and cinnamon gradations of the dawn found Alvor still talking and the empress Ambiala still listening.

In the full light of Antares, Alvor saw that his hostess was, from a Satabborian viewpoint, a really beautiful and exquisite creature. The iridescence of her coloring was very soft and subtle, her arms and legs, though of the usual number, were all voluptuously rounded, and the features of her face were capable of a wide range of expression. Her usual look, however, was one of a sad and wistful yearning. This look Alvor came to understand, when, with a growing knowledge of her language, he learned that she too was a poet, that she had always been troubled by vague desires for the exotic and the far-off, and that she was thoroughly bored with everything in Omanorion, and especially with the male Alphads of that region, none of whom could rightfully boast of having been her lover even for a day. Alvor's biological difference from these males was evidently the secret of his initial fascination for her.

The poet's life in the palace of Ambiala, where he found that he was looked upon as a permanent guest, was from the beginning much more agree-

able than his existence in Ulphalor had been. For one thing, there was Ambiala herself, who impressed him as being infinitely more intelligent than the females of Sarpoulom, and whose attitude was so thoughtful and sympathetic and admiring, in contra-distinction to the attitude of these aforesaid females. Also, the servitors of the palace and the people of Lompior, though they doubtless regarded Alvor as a quite singular sort of being, were at least more tolerant than the Ulphalorians; and he met with no manner of rudeness among them at any time. Moreover, if there were any priesthoods in Omanorion, they were not of the uncompromising type he had met north of the equator, and it would seem that nothing was to be feared from them. No one ever spoke of religion to Alvor in this ideal realm, and somehow he never actually learned whether or not Omanorion possessed any gods or hierarchies. Remembering his ordeal in the Inquisition of the Cosmic Mother, he was quite willing not to broach the subject, anyway.

ALVOR MADE rapid progress in the language of Omanorion, since the empress herself was his teacher. He soon learned more and more about her ideas and tastes, about her romantic love for the triple moonlight, and the odd flowers

that she cultivated with so much care and so much delectation. These blossoms were rare anywhere in Satabbor: some of them were anemones that came from the tops of almost inaccessible mountains many leagues in height, and others were forms inconceivably more bizarre than orchids, mainly from terrific jungles near the southern pole. He was soon privileged to hear her play on a certain musical instrument of the country, in which were combined the characters of the flute and the lute. And at last, one day, when he knew enough of the tongue to appreciate a few of its subtleties, she read to him from a scroll of vegetable vellum one of her poems, an ode to a star known as Atana by the people of Omanorion. This ode was truly exquisite, was replete with poetic fancies of a high order, and expressed a half-ironic yearning, sadly conscious of its own impossibility, for the ultra-sidereal realms of Atana. Ending, she added, "I have always loved Atana, because it is so little and so far away."

On questioning her, Alvor learned to his overwhelming amazement, that Atana was identical with a minute star called Arot in Ulphalor, which Vizaphmal had once pointed out to him as the sun of his own Earth. This star was visible only in the rare interlunar dark, and it was considered a test of good

eyesight to see it even then.

When the poet had communicated this bit of astronomical information to Ambiala, that the star Atana was his own native sun, and had also told her of his *Ode to Antares*, a most affecting scene occurred, for the empress encircled him with her five arms and cried out, "Do you not feel, as I do, that we were destined for each other?"

Though he was a little discomposed by Ambiala's display of affection, Alvor could do no less than assent. The two beings, so dissimilar in external ways, were absolutely overcome by the rapport revealed in this comparing of poetic notes; and a real understanding, rare even with persons of the same evolutionary type, was established between them henceforward. Alvor soon developed a new appreciation of the outward charms of Ambiala, which, to tell the truth, had not altogether intrigued him heretofore. He reflected that after all her five arms and three legs and three eyes were merely a superabundance of anatomical features upon which human love was wont to set by no means a lowly value. As for her opalescent coloring, it was, he thought, much more lovely than the agglomeration of outlandish hues with which the human female figure had been adorned in many modernistic paintings.

When it became known in

Lompior that Alvor was the lover of Ambiala, no surprise or censure was expressed by anyone. Doubtless the people, especially the male Alphads who had vainly wooed the empress, thought that her tastes were queer, not to say eccentric. But

anyway, no comment was made; it was her own amour after all, and no one else could carry it on for her. It would seem, from this, that the people of Omanorion had mastered the ultra-civilized art of minding their own business.

THE RECKONING

(Continued from page 81)

What do we do when a reader misunderstands and rates a story "O" and then the next story "2", etc.? We correct it; the next story must be scored as "1", because in the final rating, the lower the score, the higher the story stands.

The imperfections of the system really come in when all the stories are not rated. If I do nothing about this, then it means *in effect* that the unrated story gets a zero vote, just as if the reader scored it outstanding (O); yet I cannot assume that the reader disliked the story so that it would get an (X) — 7 points in this instance. The only way out is to rate all the unmarked stories one point higher than the stories that were rated. Here's a ballot which rates three stories 1, 2, 3, — so the unrated ones all get a 4. I'm not too happy about this, but that's the best I can do; certainly I cannot throw this ballot out and deprive authors of votes they have earned. For a time, I refused to score ballots or letters, etc., which mentioned only one story — but this, too, is unfair. Unless I know for sure that some sort of ballot-padding is going on (and it's easy to spot, really!) such a vote is accepted and scored as indicated above.

Here's how the Spring contents came out: (1) *Lilies*, by Robert A. W. Lowndes; (2) *The Vale of Lost Women*, by Robert E. Howard; (3) *The Ghoul Gallery*, by Hugh B. Cave; (4) *The Room of Shadows*, by Arthur J. Burks; (5) *The Doom of London*, by Robert Barr; (6) *The Flaw*, by J. Vernon Shea.

The three stories following number one were very close together in point scores and Burks and Howard both took and held first place at different times.

A Song For Men That Laugh

by ROBERT E. HOWARD

Satan is my brother, Satan is my son,
Satan was my guiding star before my life begun.
I follow all his highroads, the gaudy roads that shine —
Satan is my brother, and I have drunk his wine.

Down the hill together, reeling, roaring drunk,
We have staggered when the moon was a Chinese junk
On a starry ocean, spreading yellow sails,
Seven thousand little demons, rowing with their tails.

Out of the brothels we have come careening,
On each side a flaming wench, on our shoulders leaning.
Leave the pious righteousness to the priests and churls!
Satan is my brother, and I have kissed his girls.

Satan gives me promises — bitter is his mead! —
He will give me my reward for each flaming deed.
Satan has a place for me, weaving to his spell —
I will find a burning berth in his bitter Hell.

Satan gives me word of this, o'er the tavern table,
I will curry flaming steeds in the Devil's stable.
Out across the brothel sounds his brooding yell:
All my life will win for me is a berth in Hell.

But I'd rather bide there, mocked by Demons Seven
Than to live with prudes and priests in a sexless heaven!
High roads and by roads, and all the world is dim!
Satan is my brother, and I will follow him.

It Is Written . . .

Everyone who writes in about an issue does not necessarily talk about the cover, or for that matter make any specific rating of the contents; so all we can say about your reactions to Virgil Finlay's picture which graced our Spring issue is that better than 75% of those who voted by the middle of January felt that it was a grace rather than a disgrace.

We have not closed the polls for story ratings as this is being typed, since *The Reckoning* is set up when an issue is closed — three to four weeks after the bulk of the copy goes to the printer, as rule — thus allowing more time for the ballots to come in. However, we can tell you that the reactions to the new "Conan" story by Robert E. Howard were just about what we had expected they would be. Rather than give you a premature summary, we'll let you see the types of opinion we have received thus far.

Gene D'Orsogna writes from Stony Brook, New York: "As to Howard, all I can say is: he appealed to me when I was thirteen, about the same age when I enjoyed Tarzan. Now from the lofty age of seventeen, I can state only that he bores me."

Charles Hixley writes: "The so-called 'Conan' story with its fantasy domino slightly askew is a thinly-masked 'porny' of the cheapest sado-sexual variety and doesn't belong in your pages and wasn't, I'm sure, authored by Robert E. Howard. Sick as that lad may have been, he at

don't miss

SECRET OF LOST VALLEY

by Robert E. Howard

in the Spring issue of

**STARTLING
MYSTERY STORIES**

Did You Miss These Back Issues Of MAGAZINE OF HORROR?

#1, August 1963: *The Man With a Thousand Legs*, Frank Belknap Long; *A Thing of Beauty*, Wallace West; *The Yellow Sign*, Robert W. Chambers; *The Maze and the Monster*, Edward D. Hoch; *The Death of Halpin Frayser*, Ambrose Bierce; *Babylon: 70 M.*, Donald A. Wollheim; *The Inexperienced Ghost*, H. G. Wells; *The Unbeliever*, Robert Silverberg; *Fidel Bassin*, W. J. Stamper; *The Last Dawn*, Frank Lillie Pollock, *The Undying Head* Mark Twain.

#2, November 1963: *The Space-Eaters*, Frank Belknap Long; *The Faceless Thing*, Edward D. Hoch; *The Red Room*, H. G. Wells; *Hungary's Female Vampire*, Dean Lipton; *A Tough Tussle*, Ambrose Bierce; *Doorslammer*, Donald A. Wollheim; *The Electric Chair*, George Waight; *The Other One*, Jerry L. Keane; *The Charmer*, Archie Binns; *Clarissa*, Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Strange Ride of Morrowble Jukes*, Rudyard Kipling.

Order From Page 128

least was an author with imagination and writing skill — of sorts — and had the taste and discretion to flesh out his erotic fetishes with some semblance of narrative — and *that* in a category that could be honestly labelled macabre, outre, fantastic. If this was by Howard (and I seriously challenge that labeling) it was surely a segment of something of greater length and depth — and less spuriousness."

Carrington B. Dixon, Jr., writes from Texas: "1967 seems to be a

Did You Miss These Back Issues Of MAGAZINE OF HORROR?

#3, February 1964: *The Seeds of Death*, David H. Keller; *The Seeking Thing*, Janet Hirsch; *A Vision of Judgment*, H. G. Wells; *The Place of the Pythons*, Arthur J. Burks; *Jean Bouchon*, S. Baring-Gould; *The Door*, Rachel Cosgrove Payes; *One Summer Night*, Ambrose Bierce; *Luella Miller*, Mary Wilkins-Freeman; *They That Wait*, H. S. W. Chibbett; *The Repairer of Reputations*, Robert W. Chambers.

#4, May 1964: Out of print.

#5, September 1964: *Cassius*, Henry S. Whitehead; *Love at First Sight*, J. L. Miller; *Five-Year Contract*, J. Vernon Shea; *The House of the Worm*, Merle Prout; *The Beautiful Suit*, H. G. Wells; *A Stranger Came to Reap*, Stephen Dentinger; *The Morning the Birds Forgot to Sing*, Walt Liebscher; *Bones*, Donald A. Wollheim; *The Ghostly Rental*, Henry James.

Order From Page 128

good year for Conan. First FANTASTIC reprints *People of the Black Circle*, and now both MOH and FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION bring out new Conan stories! Of the two new ones, however, yours is 100% Howard, and it is easily the better of the two. I cannot imagine why *The Vale of Lost Women* was not published during Howard's lifetime; unless it was that he did not live to submit it. It is certainly one of Howard's better works. It is somewhat atypical for a Conan story but magnificent nonetheless. The fact that it is told in third person limited from Livia's point of view adds a great deal to the story. The fight scenes still have gusto, but something has been added. The descent into the Vale has a chill missing in most Conan stories; we know that, no matter what the odds, Conan will come out with a whole skin, but women do not always fare so well. . . . This was easily the outstanding story of the issue."

Let's see, now: I was just a little past sixteen when *The Phoenix on the Sword* appeared in WEIRD TALES — December 1932 issue, on sale first of November, my birthday being September 4th — and a couple of years later some of the Conan stories (though not all) rather bored me, too. Rereading them today, I enjoy them more now than I did then.

And having reread the entire series a year or so back, in the Gnome Press editions, I find the elements that Friend Hidley complains of running through just about all of them. It seems to me that some of these elements are less overt in *The Vale of Lost Women* than in various of the other Conan stories published during Howard's lifetime. I'm not in a position to state *ex cathedra* that this was 100% Howard, but only that I found the style consistent with those Howard stories about which no doubts have been expressed — while, as I mentioned once to

Coming Next Issue

I stared at the face and gasped. This a mummy? This the face of a girl who had died countless centuries before? Why, she might only just have died. The skin, with its delicate olive tinge, was perfectly preserved; it even seemed slightly flushed, as if the blood pulsated underneath its peach-smooth surface. The eyes were closed, but there was the hint of a pupil beneath the white eyelid, shaded with long, black lashes.

And it seemed to be as if the ghost of a smile hovered about the mouth, a smile, a loving, mocking smile, as if the dead girl's last thoughts had been of the man to whom she had sworn by the god Horus that neither life nor death should separate them! . . .

Suddenly Neil flung himself down before the coffin. His hands clasped the sides of the wooden case. He looked into the face of the dead princess, and a sobbing moan came from his lips.

"Amen-Ra! Amen-Ra!" he cried. "I love you still, and ever I have awaited you. I have been true to the oath we swore together, and Horus, whom we trusted, will yet restore us to one another. Do you not know me? Wake from your long sleep and speak to me. Look at me, and tell me that you love me still."

. . . I moved forward and laid my hand upon his shoulder . . . But his whole form was rigid as a rock, or, rather, like that of a man in catalepsy. And as I hesitated, uncertain what to do, once more there came that horrid rending of claws against the outside of the shuttered windows.

Stranger than you would expect is this tale of

THE CURSE OF AMEN-RA

by Victor Rousseau

and, among many other items, we hope to offer you

The Laughing Duke

by Wallace West

*The Old Duke vowed
he would return . . .*

WILLIAMSON

by Henry S. Whitehead

*First magazine publication
of a story you requested*

Sprague de Camp in Philadelphia, the Nyberg-de Camp novel, and to a fair extent Sprague's own reworkings or completions of REH tales, good to excellent in their own way, lack an essential element. (Read a

few paragraphs from an authentic Conan story aloud, then a few paragraphs — choose at random in both instances — from the Nyberg particularly, but also from a Howard-de Camp "collaboration", and, if you have an ear for music you will hear the difference immediately in the Nyberg. It may not always be apparent the first selection from one of the Howard-de Camp tales, all depending upon whether you hit upon a section unchanged from REH's original or not.)

One of the things that appealed to me particularly about *The Vale of Lost Women* was the difference that Reader Dixon, Jr. mentions. How would I rate this particular story in relation to the series as a whole? Neither the best nor the worst, I'd say, but something better than mid-point.

The editor re-runs one of his own stories that have been requested only when he honestly feels that the particular one (with such reworking as seems desirable) is better than just "good enough" to appear in MOH. (Some stories do get in that are little more than "good enough", simply because there is nothing better in that particular length at that particular moment, and that particular length is urgently needed right then. The General Law of Perversity asserts that if it is possible for a better story to reach us just a few hours too late in these circumstances, then it will. And sometimes it has!) More than that, we do our best to see to it that our effort appears in any issue with strong competition. Who could get any gratification out of winning first place by default?

Right now, I do not know just how *Lilies* will wind up; thus far, it has been in and out of first place twice, being there at this particular moment; but the afternoon mail could easily alter the picture. REH, Arthur J. Burks, and Hugh B. Cave

Did You Miss These

Back Issues Of

MAGAZINE OF HORROR?

#6, November 1964: *Caverns of Horror*, Laurence Manning; *Prodigy*, Walt Liebscher; *The Mask*, Robert W. Chambers; *The Life-After-Death of Mr. Thaddeus Warde*, Robert Barbour Johnson; *The Feminine Fraction*, David Grinnell; *Dr. Heidegger's Experiment*, Nathaniel Hawthorne; *The Pacer*, August Derleth; *The Moth*, H. G. Wells; *The Door to Saturn*, Clark Ashton Smith.

#7, January 1965: *The Thing From — Outside*, George Allan England; *Black Thing at Midnight*, Joseph Payne Brennan; *The Shadows on the Wall*, Mary Wilkins-Freeman; *The Phantom Farmhouse*, Seabury Quinn; *The Oblong Box*, Edgar Allan Poe; *A Way With Kids*, Ed M. Clinton; *The Devil of the Marsh*, E. B. Marriott-Watson; *The Shuttered Room*, H. P. Lovecraft & August Derleth.

#8, April 1965: *The Black Laugh*, William J. Makin; *The Hand of Glory*, R. H. D. Barham; *The Garrison*, David Grinnell; *Passeur*, Robert W. Chambers; *The Lady of the Velvet Collar*, Washington Irving; *Jack*, Reynold Junker; *The Burglar-Proof Vault*, Oliver Taylor; *The Dead Who Walk*, Ray Cummings.

Order From Page 128

have been putting up a terrific fight, as it were, and any one or more of them may wind up ahead in the final stretch. Meanwhile, honesty (spelled v-a-n-i-t-y) urges me to preserve some of the things that have been said thus far.

Bob Righetti writes: "I wish to apologize to Mr. Robert A. W. Lowndes. When I first saw the story whose authorship was claimed by him, I thought to myself, 'So, ole RAWL the awl is pullin' a fast one, eh. Hah! I've probably written better book reports than anything this guy has ever pecked out. I'll even wager he can't read his own worm tracks.'

"Then, when I read the epitaph below his name I said, 'Hah!' again. 'I'll bet yo even clams that HUMPTY DUMPTY MAGAZINE wouldn't even smell this one.'

"Well, Mr. Lowndes, after carefully reading *Lilies*, I nearly rolled off my bed and into the spittoon below it. I do not think I've read such a finely-knitted story in a long time. Your method of setting atmosphere and sepulchral landslides reminds me very much of Lovecraft. I take it he played a good size in laying a format for your style of writing. I've read some cockamamies in my time, but since reading *Some Of Your Blood* by good ole Sturgeon himself, I haven't been so fulfilled in a good many moons. Let's see more of your work."

Richard Grose writes from Michigan: "I found the last half of *Lilies* much better than the first and the ending the best part of the tale."

Reader Dixon continues his comments with: "By rating *Vale* outstanding I can still give your own *Lilies* the first place it would have had in any other issue. I enjoyed it very much, but I do not see what was in it to make the editor reject it originally. Apparently tastes have changed quite a bit since 1940. I

Did You Miss These

Back Issues Of

MAGAZINE OF HORROR?

#9, June 1965: *The Night Wire*, H. F. Arnold; *Sacrilege*, Wallace West; *All the Stain of Long Delight*, Jerome Clark; *Skulls in the Stars*, Robert E. Howard; *The Photographs*, Richard Marsh; *The Distortion out of Space*, Francis Flagg; *Guarantee Period*, William M. Danner; *The Door in the Wall*, H. G. Wells; *The Three Low Masses*, Alphonse Daudet; *The Whistling Room*, William Hope Hodgson.

#10, August 1965: *The Girl at Heddon's*, Pauline Kappel Prilucik; *The Torture of Hope*, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam; *The Cloth of Madness*, Seabury Quinn; *The Tree*, Gerald W. Page; *In the Court of the Dragon*, Robert W. Chambers; *Placide's Wife*, Kirk Mashburn; *Come Closer*, Joanna Russ; *The Plague of the Living Dead*, A. Hyatt Verrill.

#11, November 1965: *The Empty Zoo*, Edward D. Hoch; *A Psychological Shipwreck*, Ambrose Bierce; *The Call of the Mech-Men*, Laurence Manning; *Was It a Dream?*, Guy de Maupassant; *Under the Han Tree*, Katherine Yates; *The Head of Du Bois*, Dorothy Norman Cooke; *The Dweller in Dark Valley*, (verse), Robert E. Howard; *The Devil's Pool*, Greya la Spina.

Order From Page 128

COMING NEXT ISSUE

A Sense Of Crawling

by Robert Edmond Alter

Did You Miss These

Back Issues Of

MAGAZINE OF HORROR?

#12, Winter 1965/66: *The Faceless God*, Robert Bloch; *Master Nicholas*, Seabury Quinn; *But Not the Herald*, Roger Zelazny; *Dr. Muncing, Exorcist*, Gordon MacCreagh; *The Affair at 7 Rue de M.*, John Steinbeck; *The Man in the Dark*, Irwin Ross; *The Abyss*, Robert A. W. Lowndes; *Destination* (verse), Robert E. Howard; *Memories of HPL*, Muriel E. Eddy; *The Black Beast*, Henry S. Whitehead.

#13, Summer 1966: *The Thing in the House*, H. F. Scotten; *Divine Madness*, Roger Zelazny; *Valley of the Lost*, Robert E. Howard; *Heredité*, David H. Keller; *Dwelling of the Righteous*, Anna Hunger; *Almost Immortal*, Austin Hall.

#14, Winter 1966/67: *The Lair of Star-Spawn*, Derleth & Scherer; *The Vacant Lot*, Mary Wilkins-Freeman; *Proof*, S. Fowler Wright; *Comes Now the Power*, Roger Zelazny; *The Moth Message*, Laurence Manning; *The Friendly Demon*, Daniel DeFoe; *Dark Hollow*, Emil Petaja; *An Inhabitant of Carcosa*, Ambrose Bierce; *The Monster-God of Mamurth*, Edmond Hamilton.

#15, Spring 1967: *The Room of Shadows*, Arthur J. Burks; *Lilies*, Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Flaw*, J. Vernon Shea; *The Doom of London*, Robert Barr; *The Vale of Lost Women*, Robert E. Howard; *The Ghoul Gallery*, Hugh B. Cave.

Order From Page 128

was also impressed by your apparent familiarity with some of the more out-of-the-way corners of music. The idea of *any* pianist playing Ives' *Concord Sonata* in a recital in a small town is perhaps the most fantastic thing in the story! I do not doubt that he would have been laughed off the stage!"

Reader *Hidley* continues: "The quality of *Lilies* was of such a higher calibre than the short-shorts by this author that I think more of the same length should be considered for the magazine. If I have ever read a finer example of what Blackwood — or was it Lovecraft — called 'thrall-dom', I can't, at the moment, recall what it was. Beautifully non-focused and disruptive, especially in the distorted time-sense as well as place-disorientation."

Unfortunately (though I'm not dreadfully sorry, of course) the only dislike I've encountered was non-specific and the reader spoiled even that by claiming it was good, but she just didn't like it, shuddering. Well, if any blasts come in, you'll see them later. (Reverse honesty, spelled the same as above).

And if someone either doesn't care for the first or the last half, naturally, I'm happier with one's liking the last half — after all, the story was planned to lead to that end.

The 1940 version was less thoroughly worked out than the revision, and should have been returned to me for rewriting in any event; but what made the tale totally unacceptable for the US editors at the time was the sado-sexual element (which, to my eyes, is more overt than in the Howard story). Today, with unbowlitized de Sade available at innumerable newsstands and corner drugstores, borrowings from the 'porny' parts of *Arabian Nights* etc., are considerably less disturbing to editors than they were back then.

Yes, both Lovecraft and Black-

wood have had a shaping effect upon my writing style, and this was more prominent, perhaps, in those sections unchanged from the 1940 version than elsewhere.

Reader D'Orsogna continues: "Arthur J. Burks' *Room of Shadows* I have rated as "1" not because of the ending, which surprised me only slightly, but for the frightening content of the story itself. When it comes to evoking cold horror, Burks, with the exception of Lovecraft and Poe, is without peer. Perhaps I am overrating this story, but, you see, I read this piece at 2 A.M. alone. and its effects were doubled."

Reader Grose continues: "I rated *Vale of Lost Women* #1 because I found it exciting. *The Ghoulish Gallery* tied for first because of the skeleton painting, which conjured up some really fearful images in my mind. I liked *The Doom of London* for its nostalgic appeal."

P. J. Andrews, who enjoyed all the stories in the Spring issue, writes: "The *Flaw* is my nomination for not only the best story in this issue, but one of the best you have ever run in MOH. It's subtle, very subtle, and it did not make that impression upon me immediately. But a few days later I got the urge to re-read it -- and was truly horrified in the sense that one ought to be horrified on reading a horror story. Every other story in the issue makes a good deal of its effect at once, although *The Room of Shadows* and *Lilies* both have that grow-on-you quality; Barr, Cave, and Howard get their whole effect across to me at a single reading. All good stories. I'm willing to bet that Shea will not come out at the top or even near it in the final ratings. But I'm also willing to bet that some of those who rated it low will find it unforgettable later on."

Did You Miss These Issues Of STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES

#1, Summer 1966: *Village of the Dead*, Edward D. Hoch; *House of the Hatchet*, Robert Bloch; *The Off-Season*, Gerald W. Page; *The Tell-Tale Heart*, Edgar Allan Poe; *The Lurking Fear*, H. P. Lovecraft; *The Awful Injustice*, S. B. H. Hurst; *Ferguson's Capsules*, August Derleth; *The Mansion of Unholy Magic*, Seabury Quinn.

#2, Fall 1966: *The House of Horror*, Seabury Quinn; *The Men in Black*, John Brunner; *The Strange Case of Pascal*, Roger Eugene Ulmer;; *The Witch Is Dead*, Edward D. Hoch; *The Secret of the City*, Terry Carr and Ted White; *The Street* (verse), Robert W. Lowndes; *The Scourge of B'Moth*, Betram Russell.

#3, Winter 1966/67: *The Inn of Terror*, Gaston Leroux; *The Other*, Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Door of Doom*, Hugh B. Cave; *A Matter of Breeding*, Ralph Hayes; *Esmeralda*, Rama Wells; *The Trial for Murder*; Chas. Dickens & Chas. Collins; *The Blood-Flower*, Seabury Quinn.

#4, Spring 1967: *The Tottenham Werewolf*, by August Derleth; *The Secret Of Lost Valley*, by Robert E. Howard; *Medium For Justice*, by Victor Rousseau; *Si Urag Of The Tail*, by Oscar Cook; *The Temptation of Harringay*, by H. G. Wells; *The Tenants of Broussac*, by Seabury Quinn.

Order From Page 127

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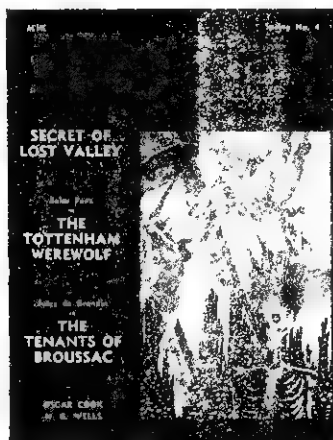
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Reader's Preference Page

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Comment — Suggested stories, authors, etc.

1

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Reader's Preference Page

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Please rate the stories in the order of your preference, as many as possible. Ties are always acceptable. If you thought a story was bad (rather than just last place), put an "X" beside it. If you thought a story was truly outstanding, above just first place, mark an "O" beside it. (Then the next-best would be "I".)

NIGHT AND SILENCE

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MR. OCTBUR

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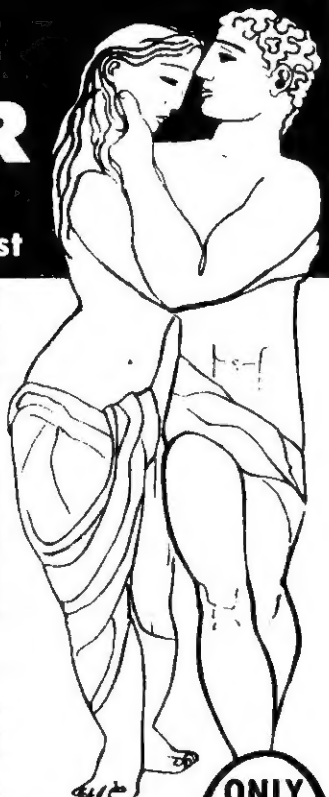
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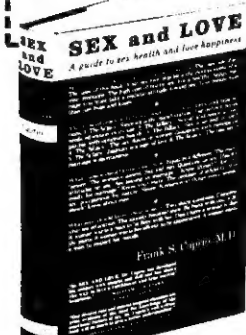
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In this amazing book, Dr. Caprio reveals little-known facts about the structure and function of the male and female genital organs, teaches you advanced techniques of using the vaginal and pelvic muscles to achieve and lengthen orgasm, goes into every detail of erotic play with lips, fingers, breasts, and "love spots".

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HAS HELPED THOUSANDS!

Here are just a few of the thousands of men and women in all walks of life who have been helped by Dr. Caprio:

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- Anne P., a housewife, "endured" sex because of an overprotective mother. Here's how she switched over to a more active sex role — and provided herself and her husband with the thrill of their lives!
- Roland M., and his wife, who for many years had been enmeshed in an unpleasant erotic game of sadism and masochism that left both feeling empty and unhappy. You'll see how they began a new life of sexual joy and fulfillment by making one small change in their relationship!

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